

The police series

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THE POLICE SERIES • WEIMAR CINEMA • MEN'S CINEMA

edited by
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3.1 THE POLICE SERIES

Jonathan Bignell

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Introduction

The focus on close analysis in this study differs from much existing critical writing about television, and within that field it differs also from much of the analysis of the police series. For a long time television criticism on the US police series has been more interested in methodologies of genre grouping (Buxton 1990), institutions and authorship (Thompson 1996) or audiences and ideological representations (D'Acci 1994). The analyses of stylistic choices in selected US police series in this study are not independent of questions of authorship, genre, form, politics and other broad issues, and the chapters briefly address these broader critical contexts in relation to the programme being discussed. But it is a contention of this study that there is a need for detailed analysis to both question and support theoretical ideas about television as a medium, and the police series specifically, that have been developed without much attention to style. The study is structured around a sequence of chapters which closely analyse the style of selected US programmes in the 1980–2003 period. The core content in each chapter consists of detailed analysis of selected sequences from episodes of the featured programme in that chapter. These detailed analyses seek to critically explore the choices made in such aspects of style as camera movement, framing and composition; editing and sequence structure; colour and lighting; performance and characterisation; music, sound and the delivery of dialogue; properties and set decoration; location and the aesthetic significance of urban space. The sequences chosen for analysis aim to be on one hand representative of the predominant visual styles of the series concerned, but also clear and interesting examples that connect to larger critical issues in the study of television dramatic fiction. While the problem of representativeness is a theoretically complex one (see Bignell 2005, 2007a), the motivation for the choice of programmes is to support an overarching argument about television's stylistic restlessness. Aesthetic instability is produced because programme-makers seek to build on perceived successes by alluding to established aesthetic forms, and also seek new audiences and new means of addressing existing audiences by innovating stylistically. Television police series formats are therefore hybrids in which interesting stylistic choices can be tried out.

The close analysis of aesthetic strategies and choices made in the production of television fiction necessarily illuminates critical questions and theoretical approaches to the medium, its genres, its production circumstances and institutions, its notions of audience and its reception. One objective of the work presented here is to assess the critical functions of style in relation to the ideology of police fiction. The structural conventions of the police series include the introduction of an enigma (a crime), its progressing investigation and its resolution. Not only does this support ideologies of law and order by demonstrating the capability of state institutions to deal with social disequilibrium, but also maps this onto the dramatic structure of television storytelling. It facilitates the division of the storylines into 'acts', and acts into scenes, where stages in the ongoing narrative are progressively presented and move toward resolution. In the US television context, this suits the division of an hour of television into several (usually four or five) segments

separated by commercials. Thus the ideological work of solving crimes is mapped onto a temporal structure characterised by linear progression towards a conclusion, and onto an institutional structure determined by the funding of network programming by spot advertising. Style, especially its rapid definition early in a programme as a marker of the programme's distinctive identity and continuity across commercial breaks, becomes a kind of glue, a differentiating marker, an ideological function and a unifying mechanism for the one-hour episodic form of television police series discussed here. For this reason, chapters pay attention to the opening moments of the selected programmes, and their title sequences, since these establish a stylistic register and dramatic tone with which the main body of the episode will be in dialogue.

Chapters in this study implicitly and explicitly evaluate the effects of stylistic choices in the programmes. Primarily, this evaluation is conducted in terms of the ways in which the style of a shot or sequence contributes to the dynamics of narration and characterisation in the episode chosen. But the significance of style to the episode itself necessarily depends on how it may evoke stylistic registers, narrative forms or specific modes of address that allude to the conventions of the police series genre more broadly, or to other television forms such as the documentary or workplace melodrama, for example. Moreover, the capacities of the police series are shaped by the dominant understandings of what television as a medium can achieve. The critical evaluation of television programmes takes many forms, but it depends on attributing value to a programme either by claiming that the programme makes best use of what the medium is or can do, or because that programme brings into television an aesthetic from outside which redresses an inherent predisposition for the medium to be of low aesthetic quality. The influential US television theorist Horace Newcombe (1974) argued that the primary attributes of broadcast television are intimacy, continuity and immediacy, and his establishment of these criteria led him to claim that the medium is most suited to working on contemporary social anxieties through narrative forms characterised by verisimilitude and involvement with character and story. He associated visual stylishness, on the other hand, with cinema rather than television, and this distinction between media on the basis of their supposed specificities has dogged critical work ever since. Some of the work in this study is directed at showing how visual style has been a crucial component that works together with, and is part of, characterisation and story rather than being secondary or subservient to them.

Modes of performance in television that are suited to the intimate domestic address of the medium and the prominence of character and story are not specific to the television medium. A focus on dialogue and character tends to privilege performance, and in the US context this means the rhythms of psychological revelation through facial expression, gesture and movement that are characteristic of US actor training based on Actors Studio Method. Despite the valuation of screenwriting in discourses about television production, where the visual means of realising programmes' scripts and formats have received less attention, moments of character revelation by bodily means and not verbal ones characterise the series discussed in this study. Indeed in some of the programmes

(for example, in *Miami Vice* (1984–89) and *NYPD Blue* (1993–2005)), dialogue is often either spoken too quietly or quickly to hear well, or it is absent from long scenes dominated by music or diegetic sound. The fact that US actors are mainly based in Hollywood and cross between theatre, cinema and television in a typical career both minimises the differences of performance style between these media and also connects television style with film style in terms of performance.

Television scholarship has defined the medium as one in which a distracted domestic viewer glances at relatively simple image compositions with low density of visual information, where images are emphasised and anchored by dialogue, sound and music. These assumptions, made initially in the era of live, studio-based, multi-camera television with monochrome pictures, have militated against detailed work on television's audio-visual aesthetics. However, as technical innovations like colour filming, stereo sound, CGI and post-production effects technology have been routinely introduced into drama production, they have given the police genre new ways of making visually distinctive narratives. The results cannot necessarily be regarded as improvements on a foregoing tradition, since this would imply teleological progress, but new claims for television's aesthetic achievement can be made on the basis of innovations in production and reception technologies. Across the period covered by the programmes discussed here, the difference in these terms between *Hill Street Blues* (1981–87) and *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* (2000–) is striking. For audiences, the significance of these different production technologies may not be immediately noticeable while viewing, but they do contribute to the audience appeal of programmes when they are launched, and to the appeal of 'landmark' programmes when they are seen again years later. Images of busy urban settings, investigative technologies, as well as punctual narrative moments which foreground spectacular physical action, are aesthetic components that address and retain viewers through distinctive forms.

The institutional context of competition between networks in US television has led to the use of 'must-see' programmes such as these police series to create programme 'brands' and network identities. As filmed series made with extensive use of location settings, a matching colour palette and lighting style in exteriors and also studio-shot interiors, place is an aspect of a branding effort to produce distinctive programmes in a competitive institutional environment. Thus *mise-en-scène* is highly significant in its literal meaning of where and how the drama is staged. New York, Miami, Las Vegas or Baltimore locations (and, interestingly, the unspecified location of Hill Street) are discussed in this study as key contributors to the meanings of the programmes. Places are distinctive parts of their identity and act as means to make distinctions from other programmes broadcast in the same period and programmes made in the past. Institutionally, however, television executives, producers of programmes, as well as actors, politicians or journalists, make distinctions that are not primarily dependent on the programme text itself, but in terms of popularity, value for money or the 'quality' status of programmes' majority audience. Building fan audiences and developing a 'cult' aesthetic in niche programmes were not very significant in Britain's 'era of scarcity' (Ellis 2000: 39–60) or in the USA's

period of network dominance, when three UK channels and three US networks provided a restricted diet aimed at satisfying mass audiences. After this period of what NBC executive Paul Klein (1975) called 'least objectionable programming', both British and US network television underwent considerable change during the 1980s and 1990s, and this led to a reconfiguration of the aesthetic criteria through which television quality was understood. The emergence of a culture of 'cult' programmes, repeated viewing, programme-related merchandise and exploitation of franchised formats was significantly dependent on the visual and aural aesthetic developed in the specifically televisual form of the episodic serial and the long-running action series. Each of the series discussed in this study was made after 1980, and belongs to that specific epoch in television history when visual style gained increased importance.

Series were designed to reward sustained viewing and involvement, through the creation of distinctive visual styles, serial character and storyline development, and generic hybridity such as blending the comic or the fantastic with the hermeneutic puzzles of detection in the crime series (see Curtin 2003). This questions the continued purchase of the concepts of the glance and flow for describing television viewership, because these are programmes that demand and reward attentive and repeated viewing. These police series also emphasise visual brands or signature styles in combination with, for example, a continued emphasis on the star performers who characterised earlier phases of production and marketing of television police and detective drama. As Simon Frith (2000) and Jane Feuer (2003) have shown, discussing UK and US television respectively, the quality of contemporary television is simultaneously defined in relation to its aesthetics, mode of production and audiences. The confusing term 'quality', which has gained increasing prominence in academic work about television, has different meanings in these different contexts. Quality television drama means an aesthetically ambitious programme by comparison with what are seen as generic, normative television productions. In this study, each police series discussed has been thought to stand out distinctively from among other programmes in the genre. Such a programme's creative imagination, authenticity or relevance might even suggest links with cinema, visual art or theatre and thus quality comes to mean 'not-like-television'. As a mode of production, it is where writing and mise-en-scène are prioritised, and the names of key creative figures responsible for these things, like Steven Bochco or Barry Levinson, become widely known. Quality television is also valuable television in that it is what valuable viewers (relatively wealthy and educated ABC1 social groups) enjoy and what they will pay for through a licence fee in the UK, but more significantly, through subscription to paid channels in both the USA and UK. Each of the programmes discussed in this study was imported and shown in Britain on one of the five terrestrial channels, and each had claims to be among the best of acquired US series. This study is one of the results of a larger programme of research about relationships between US and UK programmes, in which analysis of style is just one of a range of methodological approaches. Work on the style of the US police series is part of that project to document and evaluate the similarities and differences between US and UK television towards the end of the twentieth century. Attention to how

television style operates, and the evaluation of its significance, provide specific evidence that can add another dimension to arguments about what quality in television means.

Evaluating the significance of style in the meanings of programmes implicitly suggests that choices about mise-en-scène could have been made differently, with different effects, and thus it is sometimes relevant to consider who made these choices and why. Although this study does not document the institutional structures of production teams or the story of how programmes were made in any detail, it does contextualise the analyses of programmes with brief explanation of some of these points. The production processes of US television in the 1980–2003 period have given greater creative control over programmes to creator/producer/writers rather than episode directors or screenwriters. US writer/producers and series creators have been the devisers of programmes' formats, setting up the 'look' of programmes along with their main characters, settings, generic components and other continuing aspects of their identity. Adopting a series format means that a robust production system can be established in which numerous freelance writers and directors may contribute to a stable format overseen by this creator and manager. While not exclusively the product of decisions made by this figure, since many collaborators such as episode directors and cinematographers make important contributions, visual style in the programmes discussed here is contextualised briefly in relation to the key personnel who devised and realised it, and the production processes and technologies they used.

Each of the series discussed in this study was shot on film, as part of a long history of series production for television based in Hollywood. Production uses the resources of studios and personnel originally established for cinema and its institutional mode of production. While made for television, the emphasis on mise-en-scène associated with the greater depth of colour, contrastive lighting and more elaborate camera movement of production on film is responsible for much of the stylistic interest attributed to these programmes. This contrasts with other television forms, such as the sitcom or soap opera, which are shot with multi-camera setups and less investment in the look of the finished programme. By shooting using single cameras, with film stock used for both interior and exterior sequences, planned and consistent visual signatures are made possible for these police series, and thus programme 'brands' are set in place partly by visual style. This distinctiveness works together with other factors such as the planning of narrative arcs across episodes in a series, and the continuities of settings and character that are determined by the series 'bible' that specifies the ingredients of programme format. Because of the production system using single cameras, each shot can be individually lit and its camera positions planned to exploit point of view as much as possible. Post-production can harmonise aesthetic patterns of colour and contrast through grading processes, producing further opportunities for creative intervention after the period of shooting itself. All of these aesthetic effects are tried out in the pilot episodes for series, which are one-off television films designed to interest network executives and audiences in the possibility of a long-running series. The analyses of *Hill Street Blues*, *NYPD Blue* and *Homicide: Life on the Street* (1993–99) here are each of pilots or first episodes be-

cause of their importance in setting up the parameters of a series' style. But the work on *Miami Vice* and *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* discusses episodes further into a series run, in order to avoid over-emphasis on episodes with the specific initiatory functions of introducing settings, characters and style.

Having introduced some of the theoretical, historical and methodological issues that have prompted this study, the following five chapters each focus on a single police series, and within it on one selected episode. The analyses of *Hill Street Blues*, *Miami Vice*, *Homicide: Life on the Street*, *NYPD Blue* and *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* are intended to function as free-standing discussions, but there are continuing strands of argument that connect them. One is the simple argument that visual style is significant to the meanings of these programmes, and is not a factor that can be separated from their generic narrative components, character dynamics or ideological stance, for example. Following from this, visual style is argued to be the crucial means that determines the nature and degree of the viewer's access to a programme's fictional world. By offering and also denying knowledge to the viewer, visual style shapes how that world can be known and what the parameters of access to it may be. This epistemological dimension can be expressed as a relative proximity or distance between the characters and the viewer, where the viewer may know more or less than the characters at each moment in the drama. To introduce a difference of knowledge between the viewer and a character impacts on the effects of suspense, comedy or pathos, for example, that the narrative may generate. But it also forms the basis for the viewer's evaluation of the fictional world as one where knowability itself can be put into question. The conventions of the police series suggest that the ordering of narration and the ordering of the world parallel each other, with the expectation that narrative patterning mirrors the possibility of understanding people, action and society. While this is one of the forces evident in the programmes discussed here, this study argues that the police series as a television form is equally concerned with what can be only incompletely seen, known and resolved (Bignell 2007b). Visual style, since it is concerned with how seeing and knowing works for its characters, how this is presented to the viewer and how the viewer is able to see and know in similar and different ways to them, is bound inextricably into the problems that the police series works on.

1. *Hill Street Blues*

This precinct drama follows an ensemble of uniformed police and detectives. It was scheduled as a one-hour late-evening series introduced in the US as a January mid-season replacement for a cancelled series, and ran from 1981–87 on the NBC network. It was created and executive produced by Steven Bochco and Michael Kozoll for the MTM company, and was the first in the long run of successes that established Bochco's reputation as a television 'auteur'. The pair had been contributing writers to long-running series and had co-written the short-lived police drama *Delvechio* in 1976–77, while Bochco himself had written for the detective dramas *Ironside* (1967–75) and *McMillan and Wife* (1971–76) for example, and was story editor and chief writer for *Columbo* in 1971. So *Hill Street Blues* was created by a team that had long experience of the genre conventions of police and detective drama, and the ensemble of actors in the programme overwhelmingly consisted of performers who had already worked either in Bochco's previous pilots and series, with the MTM company in other workplace series, or in the *Police Story* anthology series of 1973–77 (see Kerr 1984: 150). *Hill Street Blues'* complex serial and series storylines were woven around about a dozen recurring characters (see Stempel 1996: 227–36), in a highly-wrought structure that claimed a level of 'realism' that was ground-breaking at the time. It depended significantly on stylistic cues drawn from US direct cinema documentary, especially *The Police Tapes* (1977), made on portable video cameras for PBS in 1976. Reviews of *Hill Street Blues* on its US debut in January 1981 and its British premiere in early 1982 focused on its realism (see Jenkins 1984: 184–6) and its cultivation of authenticity. The US television critic Todd Gitlin (1983: 274) opened his chapter on the series with the bold statement that '*Hill Street Blues'* achievement was first of all a matter of style', by which he meant its blending of dramatic and documentary forms. The series' focus on character and comedy have been eclipsed by discussion of this documentary-like realism, which is in fact a relatively minor aspect of its style.

Around the beginning of the 1980s it became increasingly common for prime-time fiction television to combine the single setting and episodic storylines which are components of the series form with the serial form's ongoing development of characters and storylines across episodes. Alongside this structural pattern, television drama adopted a style involving rapid cuts within and between storylines, using temporal ellipsis to omit establishing detail and get straight to moments of action or psychological revelation. The historical and institutional background to this development was the attempt by US television networks in the 1980s to wrest audiences in high-income and well-educated demographic groups from the emergent cable networks, and *Hill Street Blues'* fate was determined by the change in perceptions of the audience occurring at the time. Initially the series was not a ratings success and finished its first season as the 87th most popular programme that year (see Feuer 1984: 25–8). However, *Hill Street Blues* was renewed by NBC because it gained significant numbers of affluent urban viewers in the

18–49 age group for whom advertisers would pay premium rates. The series was also critically praised and eventually won the Emmy award for Outstanding Drama Series five times.

The chosen director for the pilot and the first four episodes, Robert Butler, had a long career in television drama going back to the live studio psychological realism of *Playhouse 90* (1956–61) and including Bochco's time on *Columbo* (see Gitlin 1983: 290). Making the episodes subsequent to the pilot in blocks of four enabled Butler (and later directors) to save time and money by shooting locations for more than one episode at the same time, thus providing opportunities for more elaborate lighting and rehearsal than was common. The overall effect of casting decisions, choice of director and production schedule was to prioritise the visual look of the series, and to allow for the interaction of the performers with each other to develop an ensemble style. This focus on performance as well as visual look made it possible to develop a hybrid of comedy and realism that depended on choreographing multi-character scenes in a crowded studio set, with relatively few exterior scenes. Nevertheless, the large cast and complex filming process that derived in large part from the series' stylistic innovations made production very expensive, and Bochco was asked to leave MTM (and thus *Hill Street Blues*) in 1985 as a result (see Marc & Thompson 1995: 225).

Although *Hill Street Blues* might be seen as an exceptional or even unique programme, it is in fact a hybrid of many different generic components. Its workplace ensemble drama was inherited from successful sitcoms of the 1970s, including *M*A*S*H* (1972–83) where a similar ensemble was transposed to the Korean War (paralleling the Vietnam War of the time), and *Hill Street Blues'* *verité* style portrays the city as a 'war zone' while infusing it with comedy in a similar way. According to Paul Kerr (1984: 148–9), NBC network head Fred Silverman prompted the creation of the series by asking for a hybrid of *M*A*S*H*, the police precinct sitcom *Barney Miller* (1975–82), the film *Fort Apache*, *The Bronx* (1981) and the anthology drama series *Police Story*. The particular form of this hybrid product, from its colour palette, sound montages and apparent 'wildtrack' background sound textures, to its camera style and modes of performance, are certainly unique in combination, however, and have been rightly understood as marking a step-change in episodic US network drama. Camera movement and unstable framing and composition signal to the audience that knowledge of the fictional world is partial and provisional, as discussion of specific sequences will illustrate later in this chapter. Indeed, this chapter's focus on the dynamics of how the giving and withholding of knowledge works stylistically in *Hill Street Blues* will establish this issue as a key theme of this study as a whole. These stylistic choices are matched at a structural level by the decision to use parallel montage to shift back and forth between storylines, and often to arrive at a complex and only partial closure at the ends of episodes.

Unstable viewpoint is introduced as a signature aspect of the series in the opening minutes of the pilot episode, in the ways that its music, title sequence, shooting style and editing are presented and integrated. Because the television image is small, and television competes with other activities for the viewer's attention, sound is conven-

tionally used to call the viewer to look at the screen (see Kozloff 1992: 79). Music and other sound in television programmes signify the emotional significance of images, and have a vital role in directing the viewer how to respond to action and characters. So *Hill Street Blues'* eschewal of music except in the credit sequence and scene openings after commercial breaks is a crucial signifier that operates through absence rather than presence, withholding the guiding tonal register that music would more normally provide. The pilot's and subsequent episodes' opening theme music is organised around a three-note piano cadence echoing the syllables of the title, in a minor key. Over this relaxed, even mournful tune by a small ensemble, a montage sequence shows the first of a series of white patrol cars leaving the underground car park of Hill Street Station to drive in a loose column along the rainy streets of the inner city in the grey early morning, interspersed with static shots of each main character and a caption showing that actor's name. This choice is significant in itself, for it blends a grey urban environment with conventional head and shoulders stills of actors in character. A claim for gritty contemporaneity is mixed with the privileging of performers in role, thus opening up a question for the viewer about the dramatic emphases of the series.

Each episode is structured by a day in the life of the police station, beginning before the credit sequence with a caption announcing 'Roll Call' and a dimly-lit scene in the basement of the station in which the duty sergeant Phil Esterhaus (Michael Conrad) updates the day shift officers about ongoing investigations and assigns patrol tasks, ending with the refrain 'Let's be careful out there'.

This scene enabled some of the storylines to be introduced as duty assignments were given to the continuing characters, and those characters could also be briefly established through their reactions to the assignments and each other. The roll-call sequences were shot with two cameras rolling simultaneously, on tracks positioned at ninety degrees to each other (Gitlin 1983: 293). In the pilot (Fig. 1.1), the camera shoots the sergeant in long shots, mid-shots and close-ups alternating with pans and brief tracking shots in which the camera searches

around the busy room showing individual officers and partner teams. This observational style, as if following action not planned in advance, continues when the camera moves further into the space to witness officers removing unauthorised personal weapons including flick-knives, coshes and concealed pistols, and shotguns. They load these onto the tables as instructed, only to pick them up and keep the weapons when the sergeant ends the meeting. A barrage of talk in the scene makes it difficult to locate either storyline points or character cues that may become important later, however, and this busyness and sense of lack of dramatic structure is supported by the supposedly unplanned documentary filming style. The rather shocking revelation in the pilot that the officers are fully loaded with both legally held and also illegal firearms and other weapons is



Fig. 1.1

reminiscent of an investigative documentary. But that tonal flavour is accompanied by the pronounced comic effect of the officers' legerdemain in hiding the weapons in and under their clothes, the excessive accumulation of weapons that results when they are revealed, and the casual re-equipping of themselves as they leave the room. The opening scene establishes not only generic and storyline premises, for example that effective policing might involve bending or breaking the law and internal police regulations, but also a hybrid dramatic tone that runs throughout the series and is crucial to its instability of viewpoint.

The series draws on conventional documentary shooting techniques, in which shots may be unsteady because of the use of hand-held camera, composition is not always harmonious and the observed action may be captured in movement, or partially obscured by objects or people in the frame. These characteristics connoting the observation of actuality are combined with editing techniques associated with drama. The line producer on *Hill Street Blues* (responsible for day-to-day shooting control) was Greg Hoblit, a graduate of the Film Programme at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), who said, referring to Sidney Lumet's 1973 film about an undercover New York cop: 'I read the [pilot] script and immediately a whole visual scene came to me about what it ought to be. Hand-held camera. Let's get the film as dirty as we can. What I said is, "Let's go for the *Serpico* look"' (in Gitlin 1983: 290). Butler and the producers considered using hand-held camera for the whole pilot, and also considered using 16mm black and white film to get the look of observational documentary. But the Los Angeles processing labs were unable to produce finished film in 16mm with the required speed and regularity for a long-running series so instead the pilot and subsequent episodes were shot on 35mm colour film. The hand-held technique was also too difficult to control so it was used only rarely (see Gitlin 1983: 293) and was often simulated by camera movement in shots produced by dolly-mounted cameras as in the pilot's roll-call sequence.

Nevertheless, Butler and his successor directors aimed for the aesthetic of observational documentary. For example, he encouraged supporting actors to walk through shots, sometimes obscuring principal actors, and requested that the processing labs did not optically clean or enhance colour or definition in the daily rushes that were sent to them. Wardrobe and lighting were dull in colour and designed not to look polished or over-designed. An improvisational acting ensemble, Off The Wall, were hired by Hoblit to create ambient soundtracks including scarcely-heard conversation, radio chatter and crowd noise to be laid over the final cuts of the episodes in post-production (see Gitlin 1983: 294). Scenes outside the police station were structured around following the police characters, rather than establishing a scene before their arrival, thus setting in place the expectation that the fictional world will be realised through the experience of the police officers. The consequent withholding and gradual revelation of information places *Hill Street Blues* in contrast to investigation programmes (like *Columbo*) that give the viewer privileged access to the fictional world in advance of the main character's encounter with and comprehension of it, and the variant ways that police series make use of these possibilities will be considered in later chapters of this study.

The opening roll-call sequence in each episode and the patrol sequences shot on location (but not most of the scenes in the precinct interior) eschewed the shot/reverse-shot convention familiar from cinema, in which scenes are performed several times with the camera positioned differently each time in order to capture the reactions of one character to another and to provide a coherent sense of fictional space. By contrast, *Hill Street Blues* aimed to give the impression of unrehearsed action occurring in real time. This references the conventions of documentary, where a single camera operator tries to catch the action as it occurs, and is often forced to pan quickly between speakers, and to carry the camera physically as action moves across a space. This form requires the audience to observe the police and interpret their actions without the camera providing the dramatic contrasts and movements from wider shots to close-ups which usually offer an interpretive point of view on the action. The visual style was paralleled by a style of writing dialogue that allowed for incomplete sentences and the interruption of one speaker by another. *Hill Street Blues* demanded a more active and interpretive viewer than is usual in television drama, with the camera technique implying observation and investigation as much as identification with the characters. Its structural and stylistic qualities work together to signal genre conventions but also to blur them.

Hill Street Blues borrows, via their inclusion in the repertoire of television documentary, from the French tradition of *cinéma vérité* and the American direct cinema documentary. *Cinéma vérité* openly admitted the role of the filmmakers in constructing the film and shaping the behaviour of its subjects. The ordinary people who they filmed were seen interacting with the filmmakers, being asked questions or interrupted as they spoke, and sometimes filmed as they looked at the rough cuts that had been produced. Direct cinema largely did away with analysis and argument, aiming instead to reveal individual and social truths through the camera's apparently objective witnessing of a situation. Having been given apparently unmediated evidence, the audience is invited to draw its own conclusions. Since they are necessarily unscripted, direct cinema films use the juxtaposition of editing to energise a sequence of shots into a revelatory and dramatic structure, producing narrative and involvement with their subjects by shaping the films to provide pace, a narrative arc and a sense of development (see Winston 1995: 149–69). Conversely, French *vérité* filmmakers saw themselves as participant observers, like anthropologists, taking part in the situation and putting pressure on it and its participants in order to reveal what they saw as a deeper truth. The spontaneity of these American and French documentary traditions can present police procedure effectively in drama, since police work can be shown as a succession of minor incidents that have been captured by an observing camera as they slowly unfold. The experience of duration can then contrast with the camera's efforts to capture unexpected and surprising moments as the police go about their business.

These two related but very different traditions of factual filmmaking exemplify two important components of *Hill Street Blues* as a series/serial hybrid. The first concerns the characters, who are largely police patrolmen and women, and are witnessed as if the camera makes no intervention into their situation (as in American direct cinema). Yet

secondly, the scripts put them into situations that pressurise, manipulate or invite them to reveal character (as in the French *verité* tradition) that will gradually become more complex across the series arc, and episodes of *Hill Street Blues* were usually written in blocks of four, to allow for about four continuing storylines (see Gitlin 1983: 274). Noting the use of apparently disordered *verité* style in the roll-call sequences, Jenkins accurately points out that 'it is used to mask, or render less obvious, the specific ways in which our attention is being directed and fixed, the ways in which the upcoming contents of episodes are being laid out. There is very little in the roll-call sequences which is not later developed; they are tight rather than, as they are made to appear, loose' (1984: 194).



Fig. 1.2

In the pilot's pre-credit sequence, the roll call segues into early scenes in the precinct house which are choreographed to connect the main characters as members of a collective and temporally unified fictional world. For example, as one brief interaction between Bobby Hill (Michael Warren) and Andy Renko (Charles Haid) ceases, itself partially obscured by extras walking across the frame, Mick Belker (Bruce Weitz) and a suspect walk into the shot and begin a new brief scene (Fig. 1.2). The shift of interest onto a new pair of characters takes place within the same shot, rather than cutting to a new

shot, suggesting that the camera is able to access the space of the action coherently and fluidly, despite the occasional obstruction of its visual field by activity in the station. This shot then continues as a tracking shot that follows Belker's direction of movement along the booking desk, admitting the camera into the inner space of the station and again suggesting its capacity to follow action and select dramatic incidents at will. Spatial and temporal continuity are produced by choices of camera position in relation to the set and performers, and these choices of camera position privilege brief dialogue exchanges that reveal character rather than story. At the same time, this emphasis on character is embedded in choices of shot which have sufficient depth and mobility to include the documentary-like capture of action occurring in motion and in which the presence of both foreground and background action makes the viewer's focus on the main characters' interactions more difficult to sustain.

Hill Street Blues' narrative world is character-centred, and the initially documentary-like roll-call scene gives way to a gradual settling-down of camera style into relatively conventional two- and three-character sequences using establishing shots, two-shots and close-ups in shot/reverse-shot patterns, most evident in the pilot's many scenes in Captain Frank Furillo's (Daniel J. Travanti) office. The style in the main body of each episode is motivated by character revelation and storyline progression, and the more conventional visual style has the effect of privileging dialogue and centring attention on the performers, in contrast to the busyness of the precinct setting in the roll-call scene. The series established regular characters with extended back-stories that were gradu-

ally unravelled. Some of these back-stories were revealed early on, such as Furillo's moral authority and efficiency being undercut by his status as a recovering alcoholic, his difficult relationship with his ex-wife Fay (Barbara Bosson) or his 'secret' affair with the public defender Joyce Davenport (Veronica Hamel). This affair produced a character pairing where their antagonism at work (Furillo's quest for convictions versus Davenport's high legal standards) contrasted with their romantic scenes in the bedroom or in their bath in the final sequence of many episodes when they discussed the day's events. Further character pairings, usually motivated by the practice of sending police on patrol in buddy teams, included the conservative and prejudiced SWAT team leader Howard Hunter (James B. Sikking) with pacifist Jewish hostage negotiator Henry Goldblume (Joe Spano), the sexually rapacious white John LaRue (Kiel Martin) with black former drug addict Neal Washington (Taurean Blacque), black civil rights supporter Hill and Southern redneck Renko, and the macho Joe Coffey (Ed Marinaro) with the anxiously unfeminine Lucy Bates (Betty Thomas). Within individual characters, similar conflicting binaries were established such as plain-clothes detective Belker's propensity to exaggerated violence and threats to suspects versus his inability to escape his stifling mother's constant phone calls. These pairings and internal conflicts permitted comedy and irony, for example when the practical joker LaRue loaded blanks into the militaristic Hunter's gun, so that when the depressive Hunter tried to shoot himself he was fortuitously saved. When Furillo told LaRue to deal with his alcoholism or be fired, LaRue happened to attend an AA meeting at which Furillo was present, thus revealing Furillo's 'secret'.

In the pilot episode, the introduction of these characters is carried out by pacing the lengthy first sequence in the precinct house to include dialogue exchanges between pairs and small groups of characters where shot/reverse-shot and reaction shots are motivated less by storyline information than characterisation. The initial exchange between Hill and Renko in the pre-credit sequence revolves around the vain Renko's flashy new boots, while the animalistic Belker is shown growling at and threatening a pimp who he has just arrested. The camera dwells on the tall and elegant Davenport as she walks through the station, to be offered a coffee by the squad's lothario LaRue in a conversation filled with comic double entendres. Davenport's arrival is witnessed by Bates who looks disapprovingly and enviously at her while framed by a group of ogling male officers (Fig. 1.3). The composition of the shot offers the possibility of comparing her expression to the men's. Since sharp focus and more light are given to her than her colleagues, the shot emphasises her and makes a point about her frustration with being undervalued by the men, and compared unfavourably by them with the alluring Davenport. The well-meaning Goldblume is shot in a head-on mid-shot when the episode moves to an exterior scene beginning the first major storyline about a liquor store hold-up (Fig. 1.4). However, the lengthy forty-second shot of Goldblume is



Fig. 1.3



Fig. 1.4

motivated not by the plot significance of the scene but by the visual information it offers about his juggling of police procedures, his concern for the perpetrators of the hold-up who are teenage Hispanic boys, and his determination to forestall the violent resolution of the crisis by Hunter's SWAT team. This juggling is represented visually by Goldblume's management of a telephone, a notebook, a baby's dummy from his pocket, his spectacles and a page torn from the phone book all at the same time.

So what *Hill Street Blues* achieves, by means of a blend of documentary with drama and comedy conventions, is a form dominated by the investigation of character. The visual style of the series serves characterisation by highlighting the contrasts and parallels between characters, made possible by numerous pairings of officers with each other, romantic couples (especially Furillo and Davenport), encounters in the populous space of the squad room and the sporadic or one-off interactions between suspects, perpetrators and witnesses encountered in the multiple storylines. This largely psychological emphasis is embedded amongst the signifiers of realism present in the adoption of documentary conventions, overlapping scene construction and the aesthetic choices of dull colour palette and costume, unobtrusive lighting and busy, mobile shot composition.

The compromises between the character familiarity necessary to *Hill Street Blues'* serial components, the documentary realism of some of its visual style and its self-conscious aestheticisation as 'quality' television can be seen in the final sequences of the pilot. The original pilot's long sequence at the end is an exception to the visual style of the rest of the episode, and features an unsteady camera which selects details of Hill's and Renko's shooting by a drug addict and offers static shots of the abandoned building in which they are left for dead. The scene is considerably shortened on the Channel 4 DVD version of the series presumably because of the DVD's 12 certification, and the original will therefore be described in some detail. The scene was preceded by a series of scenes of characteristically mixed tone in which Hill and Renko respond to a call where they find a couple arguing as their daughter tries to hide from her sexually rapacious stepfather. Hill and Renko emerge from the building to find that their patrol car has been stolen. Looking around the area, they walk into an apparently abandoned building that is being used by drug addicts. A point-of-view shot picks out the group of young men as they react to the policemen's entrance, then a close-up of the floor beneath their feet shows a spoon, plastic bag of heroin and a syringe falling to the ground. The camera returns to a mid-shot of the addicts and a reverse shot of Hill and Renko reaching for their pistols, then a close-up of Hill's hand drawing his gun. The camera reverses again to show one of the addicts approximately from Renko's point of view as he aims a gun at the policemen and fires. At this point the images slow down to about half normal speed, and the sound texture changes to remove all noise except the gunshots so that their aural impact is emphasised. Reversing to show Renko in medium close-up, the

camera sees him cry out and fall backwards (Fig. 1.5), with a cut back to the addict's gun in shallow depth of field that favours the gun barrel and its bright blast-flash obscuring the front of his blurred body. A cut back to Renko sees him falling towards and to the side of the camera. A second mid-shot of the gunman shows him fire again, with a cut to Hill who falls backwards. The camera position moves to floor level to show Renko's shiny new cowboy boots slipping as his body begins to twist and fall. A

mid-shot shows Hill falling too, tilting down to see that he collapses into Renko's arms. On this shot all diegetic sound disappears, and is replaced with the simple piano phrase that begins each episode's opening credit sequence. The camera returns to the close-up of the floor where drug paraphernalia lies on the ground, and this is followed by a floor-level shot using a distorting lens that takes in the policemen's legs, the floor and stairs of the building, framed by a partial iris border at the edges of the screen. Another shot picks out a detail of the stairway before cutting to a slightly elevated wide shot looking back towards the building's doorway, in front of which Hill's and Renko's bodies lie still. The previous two shots are repeated with the camera pulled back to show more of the background of the hallway in the first shot and the policemen's bodies in the second, with the piano theme music still playing in a slowed-down tempo, then the episode fades to black for the final commercial break as the piano phrase resolves to its final chord.

The sequence enforces a focus on Hill and Renko as key characters in the episode and among the ensemble of their colleagues, since no other characters are favoured with the foregrounded stylisation of action that occurs in this scene. However, on the other hand, it seems that they are both dead and this surprising turning-point both raises the stakes of the audience's involvement with them and displaces the comic tone of much of the foregoing drama in exchange for a tragic one. It was Bochco and David Milch's intention that at least one of the pair would be killed, but test screenings of the pilot showed that audiences particularly liked the two characters and it was decided that they would both survive and become fixtures for the whole series. At the end of the episode Furillo learns that Hill's and Renko's condition is critical but that they are alive. The aesthetic and emotional impact of the long sequence remains in the screened version of the pilot, but is framed by material that remodulates it as a hook to entice continued viewing rather than as a bleak downbeat conclusion.

Throughout the next and final segment of the episode there is a sense of gathering pathos achieved by introducing cross-cutting that contrasts the epistemic position of spectator and characters. After the commercial break the narrative leaves Hill and Renko entirely, and cuts to the resolution of the liquor store hold-up where Furillo protects the Hispanic teenagers from the shooting of a SWAT team who had misheard a falling champagne bottle as a gunshot endangering the hostages. In a moment of comic physical business, Hunter accidentally breaks the shop's windows and walks away before anyone



Fig. 1.5

can notice. Back in the precinct house, Davenport pours coffee over LaRue's crotch, saying 'No hard feelings', resolving the comic sequence of double entendres that began their relationship and reversing its dynamics of gender power with a joke about LaRue's potency. A scene in which Furillo and Davenport kiss in bed, revealing for the first time that they are a romantic couple as well as rivals in their professional roles, is intercut with the discovery of Hill and Renko's bodies. None of the characters the audience sees completing storylines and reinforcing character profiles know about Hill's and Renko's fate until near the end. While the comic business and verbal wit of the closing scenes matches the tone of the preceding drama, these scenes are interestingly counterpointed by the hovering significance of the patrolmen's shooting, whose impact is assured by the length of that sequence, its different and self-conscious visual style and its positioning just before the commercial break that precedes the last part of the episode.

The style of *Hill Street Blues* is a more complex and less unified entity than has often been supposed. The style is a hybrid assemblage that draws on cinematic and televisual antecedents, belonging to the different dramatic modes of heightened naturalism and comedy, and the rhetoric of documentary forms of both European and US origin. The connective tissue that holds this series together stylistically and dramatically is the central significance of character. This became increasingly pronounced as the series continued, as the potentially confusing parallel montage and partial resolution of storylines reduced because NBC demanded more conventional storylines with a single resolved plotline in each episode (see Gitlin 1983: 305). There was progressively less radical stylisation in the episodes' visual form yet greater stylisation in the performances of the lead actors. Despite the acclaim of *Hill Street Blues* for being (in loose terms) realistic, which derives from its evident but actually sporadic and fragmentary adoption of documentary conventions, it is much more like *M*A*S*H* than *The Police Tapes* because of the greater emphasis on performance and characterisation. The visual style gives the viewer access to a confusing and down-at-heel precinct environment, alluding to observational documentary but picking out aspects of the visual field that will be taken up as significant to character development or storyline progression. The use of more stable and harmoniously-framed shots of characters, matching the conventions of drama that privilege tensions between them, especially in terms of character pairings set up by the narrative, again demonstrate the camera's ability to know them. Even the extended sequence of Hill's and Renko's shooting, despite its unconventional visual form, works to foreground the dramatic stakes of their apparent death in counterpoint with the immediately following scenes where their fate remains unknown. The hybridity of *Hill Street Blues'* style is thus far from incoherent or deconstructive, though it does draw attention to its innovative status in the police series genre.

2. *Miami Vice*

Miami Vice, which ran from 1984–89 on the NBC network in one-hour slots on Friday evening prime-time, is widely regarded by academic critics and television aficionados as one of the most innovative television series of its time. It centred on vice-squad detectives Sonny Crockett (Don Johnson) and Ricardo Tubbs (Philip Michael Thomas) from the Miami Metro-Dade police department and their undercover investigations of drug, prostitution and firearms crime, but paid much more attention to design and production values than earlier cop series. Contemporary (men's) fashion was selected to match a consistent colour palette for sets, architectural backgrounds and props, and pop music was laid under a greater proportion of action sequences than was usual in filmed US police drama. *Miami Vice* was one of the first series to be broadcast (in the USA) with stereo sound, and significantly increased the market for stereo television sets (see Marc and Thompson 1995: 232). Episodes featured pop stars and celebrities including Phil Collins, Frank Zappa and Ted Nugent as guest stars in non-recurring roles. Moreover, contemporary chart pop was laid not only under car chases but also dialogue scenes, so that these celebrity voices functioned as aural 'guests'. These uses of music had already been tried when *Miami Vice's* creators, Michael Mann and Antony Yerkovich, had worked on the pilot for the series titled *Gold Coast* (1984), and in a famous anecdote it is claimed that the series was created when an NBC executive sent Yerkovich a memo that read simply 'MTV cops', and that Yerkovich and Mann created *Miami Vice* to fit this brief.

Before *Miami Vice*, Mann had made commercials and documentary shorts, and written episodes for genre series such as *Starsky and Hutch* (1975–77) and *Police Story* as a way of getting into the cinema business (see Hillier 1993: 107). He made television films and directed the theatrically-released *Thief* (1981, also known as *Violent Streets*) which combined the rain-washed streets and underworld settings of neo-noir cinema with a stylised soundtrack featuring avant-garde electronic pop music by the group Tangerine Dream. His subsequent feature *The Keep* (1983), a gothic horror mystery, was unpopular with both audiences and critics. Making *Miami Vice* for television rescued Mann's reputation at a low point in his career, and offered the chance for the aspirant film director to create a television form in which visual style and uses of music enriched a relatively conventional generic police drama format. Partly because of its relationship with the burgeoning pop music culture of 1980s television (especially the MTV channel), there has been some significant critical writing about *Miami Vice* which uses the series as evidence of postmodern style in popular television and as an example of how postmodern themes are expressed in popular culture (see Ross 1986; Schwichtenberg 1986; Rutsky 1988; Wang 1988; King 1990). This chapter looks much more specifically at the aesthetic of *Miami Vice* and how it is constituted by mise-en-scène and by the manipulation of conventions of genre and format.

Stylistic distinctiveness was established by Mann in the series pilot and the first 1984–85 season (see Hillier 1993: 113), which introduced a number of key elements.

Miami is presented as an environment of consumption, pleasure and wealth; the terrain of the commodity. For example, the connotations of the main title sequence relate pleasure to wealth, leisure to style, bound together in a sequence invoking visual excitement in a similar sense to the mobility and fast cutting of some television commercials and MTV videos of the period. The title sequence consists of a rapidly-edited montage in which many shots involve camera movement, and includes palm trees, flamingos, a sailboarder, a pelota game, horseracing and dog racing, a line of parked Rolls Royces, a parrot, bikini-clad young women and helicopter shots of Miami's seafront hotels. These shots alternate with a shot of the sea from a low-flying helicopter, flying rapidly towards the city's beachfront, and over this the title is superimposed in peppermint green and pink (the colours alluding to the strip worn by the Miami Dolphins football team), and lettered in an Art Deco graphic style. The sequence is accompanied by a pulsing musical theme to which the particular episode's generally driving and repetitive rock-based musical components are related. The music was composed by Jan Hammer, whose title theme and the oft-repeated 'Crockett's Theme' were chart hits when an album of the series music was released in 1985. The title sequence remained almost unchanged across its several series, and establishes Miami as a setting rather than introducing the main characters. Clearly, the meanings of place and the tone and mood of the city are to be understood as the key signifiers of the series' identity. Indeed *Miami Vice* is preoccupied with the tone or atmosphere of the city and its moral problems, and the music of its title sequence and in the episodes themselves can be seen as a way for the series to 'speak' about this through using music as a metaphor. What the music has to say is not information but tone, sometimes working as a commentary but mostly as a discourse about the world of feeling that the fictional world generates for its characters and the audience.

The stylistic components of camera movement, exaggerated colour, asymmetric framing and elaborately styled sets in the series as a whole have led some commentators such as David Buxton to complain that they 'display an overt formal force that seems extravagant in comparison to the traditional television series' (1990: 140). This attack on the series' style is driven by both a materialist political position which critiques its fictional world as cynical and shallow, and also a desire for adherence to the conventions of the police genre. Buxton continues: 'In an attempt to maintain constant visual and sound excitement, the series uses aesthetic devices from the clip (aggressive camera movements, "unnatural" colour schemes and mood music) to fill out the story rather than resorting to "irrelevant" complications of plot and dialogue' (1990: 145). Music video sequences (what he calls 'clips') are, according to Buxton, 'simple time-wasting devices from a narrative point of view' (ibid.) because although the series often deals with the problems of rampant capitalism and the failures of liberal social policies to match up to the success of capitalism and associated criminality, it is unable to resolve these contradictions and so ends up in fatalism, world-weariness and a posturing with signs that lack an organising narrative. In contrast to this view, the analysis of the 'Buddies' episode in this chapter pays special attention to the relationship between storyline construction and visual and musical style, and will argue that style is not a supplement

to or diversion from narration and characterisation but a key means of foregrounding the motifs that organise them.

The relationship between the attenuated narrative conventions of the police series and the foregrounding of style in *Miami Vice* can be seen in the frequent displacement of the structural convention of introducing a mystery that the narrative will solve. In *Miami Vice* what is introduced is more often a problem of deceptive appearance that the narrative may not find the right means to 'read'. Episode narratives are explicitly concerned with applying the law and dispensing justice, which is articulated as a problem of correctly recognising the good guys and the bad guys. The narrative of the pilot episode, for example, is not a completed or closed presentation of an achieved order, and it is commonplace across the series that Crockett and Tubbs arrest the wrong people, ineptly allow criminals to escape or their quarry is shot before they can be captured. These problems of moral action are linked to problems of maintaining a fragile sense of self, expressed in both visual and aural choices. For example, one distinctive feature of the pilot was its music, most notably in a long night-time sequence in which Crockett and Tubbs pursue a suspect across the city in a Ferrari sports car accompanied by the non-diegetic pop song 'In the Air Tonight' by Phil Collins. Thomas Carter was responsible for the sequence, and explained: 'What I wanted to do was not to use the music as just background, but as psychological subtext' (in Friedman 1985: 9). The song signifies Crockett's emotional status, where at this point he has just broken up with his wife, as Collins had done when the song was written, and Crockett has just discovered that a fellow officer is leaking information to the episode's antagonists. The music is an expressive device to register Crockett's feelings of disconnectedness and failure, and the car chase is thus not simply a digression from the storyline. Its rapid cutting between shots from camera positions on the car and at road level as it speeds past, for example, convey urgency and forward progression alongside the music's expression of being mired in despair and disappointment. While this can be interpreted, as Buxton does, as evidence of 'fatalism' in the mood of the series as a whole, the sequence has specific significance in the pilot as a realisation of character and as an expression of the counterpoint between Crockett's failures in his personal life and the vigour of his working role as a detective. Failure and powerlessness are consistent themes, and in *Miami Vice* generic narratives of investigation are problematised by the limitations of its undercover vice cops, and visual style is a key component in expressing the lack of knowledge that they have of themselves and the city's moral ambiguities.

The episode 'Buddies' (1985) has a broadly generic plot in which Crockett and Tubbs investigate a murder, but the detectives' ability to read the fictional world correctly and thus both identify right and wrong and also resolve the crime story are disturbed by confusions around the significance of family and masculine identity. There are three families in the episode: Crockett's friend Robert Cann (James Remar) celebrates the arrival of a son; Dorothy Bain (Eszter Balint), sometime cocktail waitress and battered wife, tries to protect her young baby and kills a nightclub performer; and 'The Family', a crime syndicate organised on patriarchal and hierarchical lines. Cann's family is es-

pecially ambivalent, for he not only comes to terms with being a father to his son, but is also a member of The Family, son of its 'godfather' Johnny Cannata (Tom Signorelli). The tensions between these family obligations are brought to the surface when the innocent Dorothy becomes a fugitive from The Family and Cann is asked to kill her for them. These non-recurring characters and the theme of family relationships are connected with Crockett in the 'Buddies' storyline because of his relationship with Cann's family. But the series format deals with familial relations on a larger scale, since Crockett and Tubbs are the most prominent members of a 'work family' that also includes their boss Lieutenant Castillo (Edward James Olmos), and buddy teams of two female and two male detectives. In the series pilot, Crockett broke up with his wife, leaving his son in her custody, because of his devotion to his job and his 'family' of colleagues. Tubbs arrived in Miami to pursue the killer of his brother, motivating his initial role in the series as a quest to avenge a family member.

Problems of knowledge are raised in the episode's opening pre-credit sequence, where the audience is introduced to Cann in one of Miami's glossy bars before Crockett arrives to meet him. Cann enters the bar, and wide shots establish it as visually disorienting because of its mix of relatively low-lit and undefined spaces versus a bright open area lit by a large circling overhead lighting fixture that casts multi-coloured hues over its occupants. This is a minor example of the influence of film noir (see Butler 1985) that has been discerned in the series' canted camera shots, high-contrast lighting and use of strong shadow, and deep focus to generate dynamic shot compositions stressing spatial depth and interconnecting spaces within settings. Loud diegetic rock music reinforces the visual connotations of confusion in the opening scene and makes the dialogue difficult to follow. An exchange between Cann and the barman shows that Cann is drinking too much because he is celebrating his son's birth. Crockett arrives and proposes a toast, 'Here's to the family', initiating the narrative question of what 'family' may mean. Cann draws a photograph out of his jacket, asking Crockett 'You know who's in that picture?' This moment is privileged by a close-up, to show that the photograph is of Cann and Crockett arm-in-arm as soldiers in Vietnam. Crockett identifies them as 'you and me', to which Cann replies 'No – that's me, and the godfather of my son'. The scene therefore offers two identities to Crockett, one of which is based on his complementarity with Cann and derives from their shared experiences in war. Second, Crockett is being invited into a family, with the quasi-paternal role of godfather. The close-up on the photograph, showing Crockett and Cann in a very different time and space from the narrative present, emphasises how different they may now be from each other and from who they were in the past. Cann is now a well-to-do husband and father, and Crockett a police officer, and the ways in which their identities are now different is expressed by the action that follows. The drunken Cann begins to dance on a pool table, provoking one of the players to pull a gun. Crockett, from trying to soothe with friendly words, has to draw his gun, announce himself as a police officer and save the situation. The camera takes a position from where Crockett, dressed in white, can be seen dominating the open space of the bar in a standing position, wielding his gun then manhandling the humiliated Cann out

of the bar like a police suspect. Crockett is forced to invoke his authority as a policeman to control Cann's disordered behaviour and control the space of the action. But while the audience was privileged to see Cann's lack of self-control before Crockett's arrival, Crockett's changed understanding of and response to his old friend happens in the moment. This pattern of giving the audience more knowledge than the protagonists continues in the episode and consistently undercuts the detectives' mastery over the fictional world and its characters, because they act on incomplete or incorrect knowledge or fail to act effectively on the basis of what they know.

Miami Vice is reflexive in its foregrounding of genre convention, but by quite different means from *Hill Street Blues*' allusions to hand-held style and a large number of characters in unconnected storylines. Policing in *Miami Vice* is all about surface appearance. Crockett and Tubbs mark the difference between good and evil, just and unjust, by being and looking as ambivalent as their quarries and with a contingent relationship to Miami that changes as they adopt undercover identities. In a subsequent sequence of episodes including the aptly titled 'Mirror Image' (1988), for example, Crockett is afflicted by amnesia and lives for some time as a gangster, confusing his undercover and 'real' police identities. 'Buddies', like the series as a whole, explores Crockett's separateness from Miami's fascinating but duplicitous appearances. In the Miami of *Miami Vice*, the vice cop has the same style and status as Cann the nightclub owner, for example, and to conserve a principle of differentiation and social responsibility which underwrites this world of appearance becomes a difficult enterprise. Commodities like clothes, cars and stylish homes or nightclubs are signs of wealth and the possibility of pleasure, and might be gained by the sanctioned American ideology of upward mobility and gaining wealth, but they may also be the masks and dubious rewards of crime. Crockett and Tubbs take on these signs as a disguise, but in doing so they become fetishised objects of fascination for the camera's look and for the looks of other characters, for the narrative is frequently displaced by attention to the visual appearances of the two cops, as well as the sumptuousness of the locations. Fetishisation is the elision or concealment of lack and difference, and the emphasis on how things and people outwardly appear poses a problem for the police genre's processes of separating good from bad, and moving from the unknown to the known.

In 'Buddies', Morty Price (Nathan Lane), inept comedian and partner in crime with Cannata and Doss (Frankie Valli), The Family godfathers, is knifed to death by the innocent Dorothy Bain after an attempted rape. The visual style of the scene begins with stable and conventional shot/reverse-shots, when Price welcomes Dorothy into his hotel room and offers to use his influence to get her job back. This stylistic pattern changes, however, when Price tries to initiate sex with Dorothy in exchange for his help. The camera circles them at a distance, suggesting a shift from an innocent social encounter to a more threatening one and Dorothy's confusion about what is happening. In another shift in camera style, Price's attempt to rape her is shown in slow motion produced by step-printing parts of the scene's footage (Fig. 2.1), with slowed-down sound, producing a dreamlike sequence of sexual violence where the camera is close to Dorothy's



Fig. 2.1

face. Positioning the camera close to her point of view and using slow motion reinforces the viewer's alignment with Dorothy's shock and confusion, both emphasising the assault by lengthening its duration but also distancing it to some extent by rendering it in a different style from the established means of conveying time and space in the episode. The two forms of shooting share techniques and possible connotations, since both the circling and the subjective slow-motion camera movement register threat, but the slow motion accentuates horror and

disturbance so that the violence itself is more evidently out of place and excessive. It is rare for *Miami Vice* to show hand-to-hand or bodily violence, and violence onscreen is elided in favour of an insistent and underlying threat of violence, conveyed by the almost omnipresent music and the restless movement of the camera. Following a lead that Dorothy was seen with Price, Crockett and Tubbs locate her as gunmen are trying to find the betting records that she used to wrap her baby in when she left Price's room. Typically, Crockett and Tubbs fail to catch the gunmen or Dorothy following an exchange of fire. The members of the vice squad meet to discuss Morty Price's murder, which they suspect has something to do with Cannata and Doss, and Lieutenant Castillo instructs the detectives to locate Dorothy Bain. At this point her name is an empty signifier for the police. As the cops discuss the mystery, the camera circles twice around the table at their head-height, paralleling the circling around Dorothy in Price's room and with a similar effect of impending threat but lack of plot movement. Circling seems to signify indirection and confusion, and the movement of the camera is not arrested until the naming of Dorothy Bain. The narrative's concern with the difficulty of interpreting the evidence is concretised by camera movement and unanchored point of view. This uncertainty about where to look is then taken further by the narrative, as Castillo orders the video surveillance of Cannata and Doss in the hope of finding clues to Dorothy's whereabouts and her link with the crime syndicate.

One name which appears from the surveillance is Cann, Crockett's buddy, who features in a scene where he pays a tithe of his club's weekly income to Cannata and Doss while attempting to remain separate from their illegal activities. Again, the audience is shown the evidence of Cann's involvement in The Family's vice before Crockett is aware of it, and thus the challenge it represents to Crockett's separation from vice and also his ability to discriminate good from bad in the narrative world. Crockett and Tubbs visit Cann's club, which is glittering and stylish, where Cann denies involvement in The Family's pursuit of Dorothy. But Crockett's relationship with Cann makes Tubbs suspicious and threatens the relationship between the detectives. As the two sit outside the club in Crockett's Ferrari, Tubbs accuses Crockett: 'You're not facing reality, man', to which Crockett replies 'And you're not hearing me. He's my friend', while angrily stepping on the car's accelerator to rev the engine as the pounding chords of Jan Hammer's syn-

thesised electric guitar rise in the sound mix to match it. 'Reality' is represented as a matter of reading people correctly, and the audience already knows that Crockett has misread Cann while Tubbs has accurately seen beneath Cann's outward appearance of respectability. Again, the detectives' lack of knowledge is clear to the viewer, and the implications of this threaten the detectives' relationship with each other. Sound and music are used to underscore this, in an otherwise conventional shot/reverse-shot exchange between them in the car.

Cann's godson's christening features Crockett in a white suit matching the priest's white surplice (Fig. 2.2), and a gradually intensifying musical accompaniment by Hammer's driving synthesised guitar. Visually paralleling Crockett with the priest in this sequence establishes Crockett as a moral authority, welcoming Cann and his son into the community as the ceremony confirms their names. The next shot is of Crockett splashing water on his face at police headquarters, explicitly linking this scene with the christening because of the use of holy water to anoint the child's head. Crockett looks in the mirror above the sink as Tubbs enters and announces that Cann's real name is Cannata: he is Cannata's son. Not only is Crockett party to the inclusion in the community of the changeling child (Cann/Cannata), but Cann himself as a father, businessman and friend is revealed as masked, undermining his buddy relationship with Crockett. Crockett and the camera look into the mirror at Tubbs, the other buddy, whose mirror image visually complements that of Crockett's in the frame (Fig. 2.3). Looking in the mirror, or at a character who functions as a complementary mirror image, become visual means of representing the truth or duplicity of identity. After she had killed Price in self-defence, Dorothy noticed her reflection in a huge mirror in his room (Fig. 2.4), in another instance of the audience being given more information than the characters. She stopped for a moment, but had no difficulty in looking at her image 'because' she was innocent. Right and wrong, truth and duplicity, are expressed visually as a matter of correct seeing. Identities are tested by mirrors, and looking in the mirror is a way of trying to see oneself and other people correctly. This motif is available both to the characters, since Dorothy



Fig. 2.2



Fig. 2.3



Fig. 2.4

and Crockett (and later Cann) reflect on their situation by looking at themselves in mirrors, and also to the camera since camera positions are chosen to permit the seeing of a character and his or her reflection. What works on one level as an expressive device of the narration is also present at another level as part of the fictional world. Thus the camera's interest in mirroring appears in the episode not as an added layer of commentary by stylistic means, but as an appropriate complement to the ways the characters think about themselves.

After the mirror sequence in which Cann's true identity is revealed, the gap between the detectives' knowledge and the audience's knowledge progressively narrows. Crockett confronts his buddy, and Cann confesses that his repudiation of the name Cannata and the identity of his father is because: 'It's like a scar Sonny, being related to these people. It's like having a cancer growing out of you – I mean, do you show that to somebody?' Metaphorically, Cann's patrimony has excised some organ or caused some part to grow out of control. These references to mutilation and disfigurement not only reflect back on the buddy relationship but also on the representation of the social body as the human body. The social body is expected to be a regulated set of relationships whose central metaphor is the human body's harmonious articulation of parts, so that the propriety of the physical and social bodies are mirror images for each other. Cann's dissimulation threatens the propriety of this ordered relationship between healthy body and properly functioning society, but Crockett as the representative of its order is delegated to heal the wound and thereby to repair Cann's 'cancerous' body and the fractured social body that it represents. Cann has to sacrifice his father to the law to retain his identity as a proper father himself, and this is done by his recognition and affirmation of his own true name (Cannata). For the mixing of these issues of family and patronymy reveals that the patriarchal order of The Family of crime is a distorted mirror image of conventional family relations and also the distorted mirror image of the capitalist economy. As a buddy, Crockett asks that Cann accept his 'real name' as Cannata and thereby purge his lack and social disease by speaking it to 'Sonny' Crockett. Crockett is then the godfather to whom confession is given in exchange for absolution, presiding over inclusion and exclusion from the social body as he did for Cann's child. Crockett is empowered to recognise right and wrong amid Miami's appearances, but a complete (masculine) identity which the 'scarred' Cann lacks is not coherent in itself and needs to be supplemented and complemented for Crockett by Tubbs and for Cann by Crockett. In other words, there are lacks everywhere that need to keep being filled up, or wounds that keep needing to be healed, in order to maintain the fragile law, bodies and identities in *Miami Vice's* fictional world.

Again, this problem of restoring both moral and social order is addressed in terms of visual style through the repeated motif of the mirror. Crockett insists to Cann: 'The only obligation you've got is to yourself. If you can get up in the morning, look in the mirror, and be proud of what you see, then you fulfil that obligation.' The obligation is for Cann to recognise his own image in the terms of an already-present capacity to conform to the law and to social-moral norms. Crockett's remark is visually instantiated as Cann

catches sight of, and turns away from, a mirror (Fig. 2.5). The imperative is then to take on this literal image, specifically to be able to see his family of wife and baby son and not feel guilty about connections with The Family. But as well as the set's mirror which expresses this issue visually, Crockett himself is a 'mirror' for his buddy, a moral guide. In the shot, Crockett is positioned so that he can be seen in the mirror alongside the reflection of Cann, suggesting the possibility of their complementarity. In the frame of the mirror's glass the two men share visual space and are complementary to each other, as Crockett and Tubbs were (in Fig. 2.3). One buddy relationship is compared and contrasted to the other by means of the same visual technique.

The narrative and style of *'Buddies'* work together to express persistent questions as to who the characters are and how their environment should be interpreted. This is a problem for discourses of law and justice in police drama, which are premised on the possibility that the moral status of the characters and the fictional world can be decided upon. Although Crockett and Tubbs are agents of narrative movement and embodiments of the law's identifying look, this does not fully account for the complex audio-visual construction which puts their ability to do their jobs and to know themselves in doubt. They have to be immersed in the confusing world of Miami's vice when they are undercover and it is only their efficiency and moral legitimacy which enforce ideological closure. However, the motifs such as mirroring, doubling or washing tend to problematise and confuse their identities as much as their antagonists'.

Neither the kinds of family introduced in *'Buddies'* nor the certainty of the police's ability to master Miami's criminality are stable or reliable, and this is expressed in a characteristic use of music and visual style when the song 'No Guarantees' by The Nobodys is played over a car chase at the climax of the episode (Fig. 2.6) when Crockett and Tubbs race to rescue Dorothy from Cann (characteristically, Cann escapes from Crockett at Cann's nightclub). The song's refrain is 'No guarantees in the Western world' and, like the car chase in the pilot, fast cutting, unusual camera positions conveying the speed of the chase and close-ups on the policemen's worried faces express both generic action and the risk of failure. An overhead shot shows the car skidding out of control and, typically, Crockett and Tubbs arrive late as The Family's hit-men have already started shooting at Dorothy.

A momentary closure takes place in the final scene of *'Buddies'*, after Cann goes to save Dorothy from Cannata and Doss's gunmen. The camera position shifts repeat-



Fig. 2.5



Fig. 2.6

edly to show the hitmen's eruption into Dorothy's room in medium shot, then Crockett and Tubbs bursting into it and the ensuing gun battle between them. The sequence is edited together as a series of rapid cuts, matching the staccato sounds of gunfire and fast-paced rock music on the soundtrack. The scene is a generic action sequence that functions as the climax of the episode. It would conventionally be followed by a slowing down in the pace of editing where a scene, perhaps in the detectives' squad room, would parallel the imposition of order by the police with an exchange of friendly banter between Crockett and Tubbs, returning the narrative world to a sense of normality. However, the episode ends at the close of the action sequence. Cann rescues Dorothy Bain and her baby and is injured by a flesh-wound in the shoulder from a henchman's bullet. The alternation of brief shots separated by cuts in the action sequence is completed with a mid-shot of Cann lying on the floor, cradled in Crockett's arms. He receives Crockett's benediction, 'Yeah man, you did the right thing', and the frame freezes as credits appear over it. Tubbs is not present in the shot, and there is no return to another space unmarked by the disorder of furniture and gunshot damage that the camera witnessed in the room. Visually, then, there is little sense that the fictional world has been restored to normality and the episode ending seems abrupt and curtailed. Nominally the problems of identity and justice are resolved, and the end-titles reprise the opening title sequence, re-establishing the visual paradigms of the series. But the representation of social order and its legitimacy have been threatened by the ambivalence of appearances throughout, and the ending itself only appears to restabilise the fictional world by virtue of the fact that it is the last shot.

Stylistically, *Miami Vice* seems to acknowledge the provisional and deceptive nature of what and who its characters see, by expressing their own uncertainty through the visual motifs that the camera adopts. Structurally, the screen time given to passages of psychological and emotional confusion, car chases and failures of the protagonists to achieve their goals undermines the expected conventions of the genre. The impact of these decisions is to challenge a coherent vision of society at both the literal and ideological levels. Mann and the other creative authorities in the production seem to have regarded visual style as both a vehicle for storyline and characterisation and also as a relatively autonomous feature that produced *Miami Vice's* audience appeal and distinctiveness as a 'brand'. The example of 'Buddies' shows that storyline and characterisation on one hand, and the cultivation of distinctive visual and aural style on the other, are certainly aspects of the programme which can yoke together uneasily. But attempts to link them through motifs such as mirroring or circling camera movements produce effects that comment in interesting ways on the moral dilemmas of the detectives in the specific fictional world of Miami, and the problems of knowledge and action with which that world presents them.

3. *Homicide: Life on the Street*

Homicide: Life on the Street was screened on the NBC network from 1993–99 in one-hour evening slots, was syndicated on the Lifetime cable network and has been sold abroad including screening on Channel 4 in Britain. This chapter returns to the development of a dramatic form adopting the aesthetic of hand-held filming that was used in *Hill Street Blues*, but also some of the self-conscious dramatic stylisation discussed in the chapter on *Miami Vice*. *Homicide: Life on the Street* was based on the book *Homicide: A Year on the Killing Streets* by the *Baltimore Sun* reporter David Simon, who spent a year with Baltimore police's homicide unit, and the series' producer Barry Levinson initially considered the book as the source property for a cinema film (see Troy 1997). Levinson is a native of Baltimore, and wrote and directed the Baltimore-based films *Diner* (1982), *Tin Men* (1987) and *Avalon* (1990), having begun his career in television as a writer for various series including the comedy *The Carol Burnett Show* (1967–78) in the 1970s. Comments by cast and production team (see Fretts 1993) reveal that Levinson was not only attracted by the dramatic potential of Simon's book but also by the idea of setting the series in an American city with a distinct sense of place. Positioned between New York and Washington DC, Baltimore lacks the cosmopolitan glamour of the former and the political profile of the latter, and its economic health as a centre of heavy industry was severely affected by the recessions of the 1980s. Furthermore, Baltimore as it appears in the series has been shot to distinguish it from the more usual locations for prime-time drama of Los Angeles, New York or Chicago. So not only does Levinson's conception of the series emphasise the particularity of its locations, but also the difference of those locations from urban environments associated with the police procedural genre. To further this particularity of place in the scripting of episodes, Levinson required that *Homicide's* writers worked on the series on-site (see Troy 1997), to accustom themselves to the milieu and its characteristic regional accents and idioms.

A further advantage for the production team was that the NBC executives overseeing the process were located in the main production centre of Los Angeles. This meant that their visits to the shooting locations were rare and Levinson could work with considerable freedom on the style and structure of the early episodes that established the form of the programme. For this reason, the close analysis in this chapter deals with the opening episode 'Gone for Goode', which was directed by Levinson and set the visual parameters of the series. NBC's strategy for *Homicide* was to advertise it both by emphasising its generic characteristics as a police drama with gritty storylines and strong characters, and also to appeal to a sophisticated audience familiar with the discourses of auteurism, 'adult themes' and high production values associated with the emergent cable channels and cinema. By promoting Levinson through his films *Diner*, *Good Morning, Vietnam* (1987) and *Rain Man* (1988), the audience was being offered the attractions of visual style and creative distinctiveness. The first episode was shown directly after the Super Bowl to bring the series to the attention of the largest audience of the entire year.

The first episode begins with two characters walking slowly at night towards the camera, which is hand-held and unstable, and moves quickly to focus down onto their feet. They are holding a conversation about a book one of them has read that says life is a mystery. As the camera reverses to share the direction of their movement, it is apparent that they are police detectives in a rainy street arriving at a murder scene. The opening moments of the programme raise questions for the audience about who the characters are and what kind of programme this is, though some of this mystery will already have been dispelled by the series' widely-seen trailer in the Super Bowl television coverage. The camera remains hand-held throughout the first sequence where the



Fig. 3.1

police walk into the centre of the crime scene and talk to uniformed policemen. Throughout, lighting is relatively low in the exterior setting and the illumination provided by the policemen's torches and the flashes of camera bulbs at the crime scene is prominent. Colour is muted, emphasising the grey suits, white shirts and black ties of the detectives and the black night sky (Fig. 3.1). This produces allusions to documentary and news footage, where low levels of available light in night-time shooting are likely to give rise to the same lack of colour definition and



Fig. 3.2

loss of visual detail, and strongly distances the programme from the highly coloured and brightly-lit conventions of shows in the preceding decade such as *Miami Vice*. The use of hand-held Super-16mm cameras (rather than 35mm) lent greater possibilities for camera movements to be tried out in the different takes of the same scene, responding to the performers. In the episode's first sequence, the camera moves around and up close to the detectives in the crime scene, as if following action that has not been planned-out for its convenience.

A very short interior close-up shot follows, of a hand writing with a red marker pen on a whiteboard, where the number of this crime is recorded together with the name of its victim, a Mr Becker. Punctuating the episode as a repeated motif, close-ups of the board mark the arrival of new cases into the detectives' purview, and the confirmation of their solution when victims' names in red are erased and the names are re-written in black (Fig. 3.2). Across this episode, night scenes shot with little supplementary lighting and reduced colour density repeat

episode is when a uniformed officer's flashlight, white against the black night-time trees and pallid moonlight, illuminates Bayliss's torso and hand but not his face as he pulls his reflective silver badge from his coat and says 'Homicide'.

The opening credit sequence follows the almost monochrome first scene, and comprises over a minute of rapid montage. The title sequence was shot on an 8mm camera, thus producing grainy images further processed in post-production to blur definition and increase contrast. It begins with a canted camera shooting through a car window as it drives along the empty street of a city, with colour bleached out from the buildings. This is followed by rapid camera movements panning very quickly across an indeterminate urban background, then the camera follows a car turning into a street, partially obscured by an object in the foreground. Colour remains almost entirely bleached out. Further very rapid alternations of shots show a city monument, another street seen from a car, a close-up on an office wall clock, a cobbled street with tram tracks, then a close-up of an eye and further fragments of street scenes. Next a tracking shot, again from a car window, shoots through a chain-link fence behind which a large dog barks and follows the movement of the car. The music throughout the sequence is relatively rapid but lacks strong melody and is based on an extended development of percussion and simple keyboard phrases, with intrusions of fragmented police radio communication. The sequence continues with further alternations of fragments of street scenes, men's faces and an extreme close-up of longer duration in which the camera pans slowly across the top of a police badge, revealing the word 'police' embossed on it. There are more shots of city centre monuments, which for some viewers will lead to the realisation that all of the exterior shots so far have been of the city of Baltimore. Interior shots follow, including a baseball sitting in a cup on a desk, extreme close-ups of parts of the face of a black man, and an occasional flash of red colour, which thus stands out against the black and white of the rest of the sequence. Among more brief close-ups of men's faces, the sequence returns to the police badge and pans slowly over its lower edge where the word 'Baltimore' can be seen. Following this are shots of the keypad of a telephone, more men's faces, more fragments of both the city streets and an office. The sequence draws to a close with the series title against a very strongly red-tinted photograph, in which the steps and railings at the front of a building can be made out. Only at the end of the sequence does a series of captions list the actors in the series, separately from their visual appearance, against a black background across which streaks of white light move quickly. Finally, a bleached, mainly white shot shows the reverse side of the glass door to the precinct office, on which the word 'Homicide' and the room number 203 are written.

Overall, the title sequence identifies the place in which the series is set, by fragmenting the city of Baltimore into relatively anonymous domestic buildings along with public parks and statues. Interior office settings are prominent, signified by such metonymic objects as the wall clock and telephone. The sequence identifies the faces of the lead actors (these are the men who are briefly featured) but without giving their names or providing clear visual introductions to them. The police badge, of course, identifies the series generically and geographically, and together with other elements it suggests the

sub-genre of the police squad procedural. Most significantly, the title sequence establishes the fragmented, barely-coloured and self-conscious visual aesthetic of the programme which is analysed in greater detail below. But the sequence is distinguished stylistically from the main body of the episode in which fragmentation takes the form of cuts between different takes of the same shot, rather than a montage of different shots. The title sequence's speed and complexity are also different from the use of long takes and lengthy dialogue exchanges in the episode's narrative. But what links these styles is their shared evocation of place and procedural office-based policing.

The complexity of the opening episode's storylines requires a brief summary here in order to avoid unnecessary explanation later in this chapter. The opening teaser introduced the first storyline, in which Becker's murder is investigated by Detectives Meldrick Lewis (Clark Johnson) and Steve Crosetti (Jon Polito) who visit a hospital to interview a suspect and Dollie Withers (Oni Faida Lampley), the woman accompanying Becker when he was shot, who is recovering from a head wound. It becomes clear that the attack was part of a conspiracy by Dollie's aunt to kill her for her life insurance, a crime the aunt already committed against five dead husbands, one of whom the detectives exhume from a cemetery. A new detective, Tim Bayliss, arrives to join the team and is shown around the squad room by its commander Lieutenant Al Giardello (Yaphet Kotto). John Munch (Richard Belzer) and Stanley Bolander (Ned Beatty), interview a suspect in a double stabbing. Kay Howard (Melissa Leo) and Beauregard Felton (Daniel Baldwin) are called to a scene where the decaying body of Henry Biddle has been found in a basement and they interview a suspect, Jerry Jempson (Jim Grollman). Over a group lunch, Giardello decides that Bayliss will partner Frank Pembleton (Andre Braugher). Munch and Bolander investigate the death of a young woman, Jenny Goode, a case they have previously failed to close, visiting her parents and then finding a suspect with long hair and a black sports car. They interview him on his porch, where he admits to running her down with his car. Pembleton and Felton investigate a death at a motel, taking Bayliss with them, then they interrogate a young man seen with the victim who turns out to be his killer. At the end of the episode, Bayliss takes his first phone report of a murder and goes to the scene, on a dark rainy night. These storylines begin at intervals through the episode and are intercut as they develop, thus emphasising the process of detection rather than the witnessing of crimes themselves. Point of view is thus focalised through the detectives, and the viewer's access to the fictional world is restricted to what they know. Storylines are initiated by the detectives answering telephone calls that send them to a crime scene from their squad room, and the arrival at the scene of a crime is usually the opening moment of each narrative strand.

The episode's unconventional style is evident in the scene from the first episode when Munch is interviewing a suspect in a hospital room. Throughout, the scene is segmented by a large number of cuts where the camera position changes but continuity of dialogue and action are maintained. There is no master shot from where the camera offers a whole view of the space and to which it could return to confirm the parameters of this space. The camera repeatedly 'crosses the line', breaking the 180-degree rule which

conventionally requires that camera positions are always on one side of an invisible line connecting two speakers filmed in shot/reverse-shot. The camera usually favours the person speaking, but set-ups shift without any obvious reason so that by the end of the scene we have viewed the action from various points around a roughly circular perimeter surrounding the performers. This draws attention to the visual style of the sequence, but not to serve a marked interpretive narrative system (as the motifs of *Miami Vice* did). Instead it references the attempts of a documentary filmmaker to find the best place to witness an interaction that he or she does not control, without subservience to the spatial conventions of drama. The flow of dialogue is unbroken, and since *Homicide* was shot with a single camera the different takes of the scene would require the performers to perform the same dialogue many times so that the camera could be moved to a new position for another view of the interaction. This scene might then resemble documentary inasmuch as the camera seeks out an appropriate position rather than seeming to know where the performers are going to be, but the continuity of dialogue shows that this is scripted, rehearsed and precisely performed fiction. *Homicide*'s visual style often draws on two contrasting conventions. Camera position and camera moves suggest the observation of action that was not staged for its benefit, while continuity of action across cuts and different camera positions makes clear that this is drama. There is an assertive quality to this repeated adoption of both unconventional camera positioning and editing, which draws attention to the series' style as a deliberate differentiating strategy within the police series genre.

The first season of *Homicide* predominantly comprised episodes with three and often four separate storylines, though this number reduced in later episodes. Narrative pace within scenes is created by the placement and movement of the camera rather than physical action itself, and created also by the varying rhythms of cutting between parallel storylines as opposed to following complete scenes in sequential order. Storyline segmentation and cross-cutting take the place of action scenes. One effect of this is that the conventional structure of four acts is much less evident in episodes of *Homicide* than in the writing of previous series. The action consists not of generic car chases, shootings or pursuit through the streets, but of how the camera establishes a relationship with the mood and pace of dialogue and physical performance. This can be seen in the very unusual practice of jump-cutting between noticeably different takes of the same scene in this episode and more generally in the series. The sequences omit a passage of performance time without changing the camera position, resuming shooting the performance with no significant change of composition or focus. This practice is anathema to the conventions of dramatic television (and cinema) and also rare in factual programmes since, conventionally, cutaway shots to another view are used to cover up the join between the parts of the performance, so that the slight jarring or 'jump' in the image caused by cutting the two together is unnoticed. However, 'Gone for Goode' uses numerous joins between takes of the same shot, some more noticeable than others, and it quickly becomes clear that this is a consistent strategy.

One example is when Howard is interviewing Jerry Jempson about what he knows



Fig. 3.3

regarding the murder of Biddle. A short preceding sequence has introduced the character by showing his arrival in the squad room and his entry into 'the box', an interrogation room with two-way glass in which many scenes are set. Quickly there is a cut to a mid-shot of Jempson sitting still at the table, facing the camera but with sunglasses obscuring his face so that relatively little information is offered by his physical performance. A lengthy sequence, in which there are three obvious cuts without cutaways, stays focused on his face (Fig.

3.3). Although he is still, small movements of his head and shoulders make these cuts clear to see, and they have three predominant effects. The first is to render the man's rambling discourse comic, since at first he vaguely suggests he knew the victim, and a cut resumes this denial with further extraneous digression, then another cut resumes the denial again, until finally he claims he knows nothing at all. In this case the style portrays Jempson comically, and in the episode as a whole its function is to offer evaluative comment on character. Howard's questions can be heard though she cannot be seen, but a tedious process of Jempson's distraction, time-wasting and defensiveness is being abbreviated, ending up by showing that he is both guilty and ridiculous. The second effect is therefore to privilege speech rather than physical action and to allow characters to speak at length and reveal themselves through tone, turns of phrase and minimal gesture. Thirdly, the long sequence with noticeable edits between takes foregrounds the visual style of the sequence by refusing expected conventions of continuity. Taken together, these effects show that *Homicide* is interested in people, rather than forensic investigation, physical pursuit or the detail of police procedure. The audience's knowledge of the fictional world is primarily available from what characters say and how they react to each other, and interrogation scenes like that of Jempson are important ways of staging this across the series.

A stylistic device with parallel effects to jump-cutting is evident when Munch investigates the death of Jenny Goode. Early in the sequence Munch is at his desk, looking through photographs of men to find one matching the description of the man with long blond hair whose car was seen when she was run over. Brief jump-cuts omit parts of his repeated movement of putting one photograph to the back of the pile to reveal the next. Thus the sequence, shot over Munch's shoulder in medium close-up, seems to be looping the same shot over and over again, though in fact the photographs in his hand change at each repetition. While notably stylised, this is less marked as a technique than what follows, when Munch and his partner drive to a suspect's house and interview him on his porch. Here, different takes of the man's performance shot from different camera positions are cut together. The changes of camera position make the cuts very noticeable, since the man repeats the same line of dialogue, 'I don't know, I was drinking' over and over again as he is being questioned, with the camera shooting in close-up on his

face but from suddenly different angles. Here the effect is also to make the man seem helpless to protect himself from the truth, finally evident in the change of the victim's name on the precinct's whiteboard from red to black, confirming that he was the killer. So, rather than marking an abbreviation of time, as if to cut out unnecessary detail, jump-cuts and the editing together of different takes of the same shot actually introduce far more detail into these scenes, though it is always detail of performance. Facial expression, the relationship of the performers to the background behind them, minimal gesture or movement and details of costume and appearance become intensified because they are extended in time or repeated.

The final aspect of camera style to be discussed in this chapter is the use of long takes, both where the camera is still and where it is moving. These, like hand-held camera operation and jump-cutting, are persistent features of *Homicide's* style, and occur across all of the series. Long takes produce the impression of temporal continuity, and allow the camera to follow characters in a space that they interact with to reveal themselves and the relationships between character and environment. The extended look at the character places pressure on him or her, by enforcing the viewer's concentration on the detail of how the character acts and reacts across a sustained passage of action. In 'Gone for Goode' some long takes are static dialogue scenes comprising two-shots where both speakers are fully visible to the camera in mid-shot or long shot. An early example in this episode is when Lewis and Croseti are waiting in a hospital room for the shooting victim Dollie Withers to wake up from her operation. They decide they can afford the time, and stand leaning against the window frame talking. They are not discussing the case, or giving any of the expository information that might be expected in the opening episode of a television series. Instead, Croseti talks about his ongoing studies of the murder of Abraham Lincoln, about which he has been reading for some time and which is something of an obsession for him. A large part of the scene consists of a static two-shot of this conversation, whose main purpose is to reveal character by privileging performance both by the speaking Croseti and the mainly listening Lewis. As part of this, it suggests the long familiarity that the men have with each other, and also the tenacity and attention to detail that are the hallmarks of a homicide detective. This sequence does not contribute to their detective work and is a digression from the storyline, so it suspends the conventions of detective fiction. Furthermore, such an exchange would usually be edited as a sequence of shot/reverse-shot angles, so the duration of the static two-shot draws attention to it and its style. The character structure of the series is based around the partnerships of Baltimore police detectives, where each detective has extensive interaction with his or her colleagues and long-standing relationships and rivalries between them are explored. At the same time, this occurs together with evident self-consciousness of style in how these interactions are presented.

Later in the episode, Pembleton and Bayliss are standing in the dark room next to 'the box' in which the young suspect in the motel murder is sitting alone. The camera is positioned some metres behind them, and the dark room contrasts strongly with the bright lights inside 'the box'. The difference in light levels makes it difficult for the cam-



Fig. 3.4

livery of this key speech. It reveals him to be extremely insightful and thoughtful about his profession, and presents his sense of himself as both akin to a rather seedy salesman peddling something to a consumer who does not want it, but also as a highly skilled interrogator who very often succeeds in securing a confession. Once again, the long take privileges a verbal performance and sets up a difference between the characters. Bayliss finds Pembleton ruthless and cruel because his technique aims single-mindedly for results, even though Pembleton's expertise in securing confessions is a kind of efficiency and thus valuable to the squad. A moral issue about whether the detectives are pursuing truth, their own ambition or a better clear-up rate is expressed by character interaction. Pressure on the characters from their jobs and from each other is expressed by adopting the visual style of static camera in a long take whose visual field is constrained by darkness and an internal frame.

There are three scenes which make use of long takes with moving camera in 'Gone for Goode', two of which combine exposition with character development and one which is largely centred on the relationship between Pembleton and Felton, and thus offers characterisation more than any contribution to storyline progression. When Lewis and Crosetti are working on the investigation of Dollie Withers' aunt and her dead husbands, they visit a cemetery to witness the exhumation of one of the husbands. Long hand-held tracking shots follow the detectives as they converse with the graveyard attendant (Leonard Jackson) while walking towards the grave. The camera position is alongside the line of men walking three abreast, occasionally moving ahead of them to see their faces more clearly and at times finding only two performers in the frame as their speed of movement slightly changes or the camera closes in a little on one or two of them. The camera tends to favour whoever is speaking, giving equal attention to the non-recurring character of the attendant and the two detectives. As in other sequences discussed here, this prioritises dialogue at the expense of forward movement of the storyline. Although some of the dialogue is blackly comic, concerning the process of decay of bodies in the cemetery, and is supported by the changing background of white gravestones behind the men, it also serves to inform the detectives about what they might be able to discover from the exhumed body and thus the evidence they might gain. Later in the episode, another similar visit to the cemetery is shot in the same way.

era to pick out any detail in the detectives' bodies, and their faces are almost wholly turned away from the camera. An internal frame produced by the edges of the two-way mirror in front of them further emphasises their static positioning in the shot, and their lack of engagement with the seated suspect (Fig. 3.4). Pembleton tells Bayliss in a long speech that he is like a salesman, whose job is to sell a prison sentence to a perpetrator who is assuredly not desirous of one. The unchanging lighting and composition forces attention onto Pembleton's de-

In another example, Lewis and Crosetti visit the city morgue to speak to the pathologist about the exhumed body from the cemetery. In this very long, mobile and stable take, the camera is always ahead of the detectives as they move towards it, thus keeping their faces and bodies in shot throughout. It begins as the officers walk down a long corridor. When moving around a corner, talking as they go, they stand back to make way for a stretcher carrying a body which is wheeled in front of them. Resuming their original direction of movement along the corridor towards the camera, they stop and stand in the doorway of the morgue, and finally the pathologist (Ralph Tabakin) approaches to speak to them. This shot contains little storyline information, and is instead centred on the reaction of the detectives to the environment in which they find themselves. While Lewis is relatively unconcerned, the scene's long take and wide angle permits the viewer to see at length and in detail the reaction of Crosetti to the *space*. Throughout the scene, he is sweating heavily and repeatedly mops his face with a handkerchief (Fig. 3.5). The reading of his bodily movement is thus much more significant than his words, and establishes his uneasiness with the morgue, its smell and its enclosed interior space. It is also significant in relation to this dramatic function of the scene that it cuts to another long take sequence where Crosetti and Lewis return to the cemetery (because the wrong body was exhumed), thus drawing further attention to the motif of encountering dead bodies in different locations and circumstances and also to the visual means by which this is represented.

Continuing the development of Pembleton's character which was discussed above in relation to the static long take outside 'the box', a short scene between Giardello and Pembleton leads to his departure with Felton from the squad room. In two long takes, with hand-held camera, they move through the precinct building and down into the police garage where long lines of white police cars are parked. Pembleton has a car key, and while the dialogue continues he tries one after another of the 100 or more identical cars to find the one which his key will fit (Fig. 3.6). This scene is comic, in that it is based on physical business where Pembleton repeatedly approaches a car, talking with Felton all the time, and tries a key, only to find that it is the wrong one and he moves on. When asked why he does not give up and go upstairs for another key, Pembleton replies that the next car he tries might be the right one, so going upstairs would only risk wasting more time. Of course this demonstrates Pembleton's tenacity and thoroughness, but here in a context that also sug-



Fig. 3.5



Fig. 3.6

gests that his very strengths as a detective in these respects might also be a character weakness that amounts to obsession. The dialogue between the detectives is based on Pembleton's view that Felton does not like him because he is black, and reflects on racial tension that runs through many of the scenes in this episode. By shooting the scene in long takes, the episode counterposes dialogue with physical activity that has nothing to do with it, setting up the distance from, on one hand, Pembleton's preoccupations and on the other Felton's and the audience's reading of them, leaving space for both humorous and serious reactions to the performance.

This analysis has shown that *Homicide* favours characterisation and complex dialogue interaction over the conventional generic components in police series of action sequences and narrative momentum. Across the seasons of this series, character profiles were developed that emphasised the problems for the individual detectives, whether within their jobs or in their domestic lives. For example, Munch has been married three times, Bayliss is a survivor of childhood sexual abuse by his uncle, Lewis carries the supposed bad luck of having a series of partners killed and Pembleton is a control freak who had a debilitating stroke after which his wife left him along with their daughter. By paralleling working relationships with the detectives' lives outside their work, notably their interactions about and within the bar which they decide to buy together later in the series, *Homicide* as a whole addresses the challenges to individual masculine identity that being a detective poses, and the boundaries between public and private identities. The co-executive producer Tom Fontana commented that 'Homicide detectives are the elite – the best of the best – but the procedure they do is fairly dull. What attracted Barry and me to the material is that these are thinking cops ... they can be articulate. They can have a way with language that the audience will enjoy watching as these guys verbally joust with each other' (in Troy 1997). As this chapter has discussed, visual style prioritises characters speaking at length, and the viewer's access to the fictional world is through their interaction with it and each other, primarily in dialogue. The use of long takes with still and moving camera to extend the viewer's experience of time, and repetition of moments of the action, permit the evaluation of the characters. Shifts between comedy and drama were understood as representations of the real behaviour of police detectives, masking both masculine aggression and a compassion that might signify weakness by defusing them with off-hand humour. This mixed tone is most evident in the complex writing of the episodes, with the effect of realising character and the narrative world with greater depth. But by denying the viewer any knowledge of the narrative world except what the detectives have themselves, the conventional mastery of that world achieved by the detectives' solving of crimes is rendered insecure. Instead, what the viewer is given by means of visual style and narrative structure is the detail of inter-personal interaction, and it is the detectives themselves to whom the camera and the viewer have privileged access.

4. *NYPD Blue*

NYPD Blue is another of Steven Bochco's productions, co-created with David Milch, beginning on ABC in 1993 in a late-evening Tuesday slot and running until 2006. The precinct-based drama maintains some of the stylistic texture of *Hill Street Blues*, including the extensive use of mobile camera, but unlike the earlier series it uses prominent music to underscore emotional tone. This matches *NYPD Blue*'s emphasis on performance by the lead actors, characterised by richly detailed facial expressiveness and physical gesture to convey moral and emotional turmoil, especially by Dennis Franz as Lieutenant Andy Sipowicz. Franz is one of a loose ensemble of actors who have appeared in other Bochco productions (*Hill Street Blues*, *Bay City Blues* (1983) and Milch's *Hill Street* spin-off *Beverly Hills Buntz* (1987–88), for example). *NYPD Blue*'s commitment to the development of its lead performances, and to what US commentators and some US audiences have regarded as challengingly 'adult' sexuality, earned the series numerous Emmy award nominations, of which Franz won four. This chapter will give most attention to the opening episode from September 1993 in which the 'signature' stylistic elements were first aired and were at their most prominent. These include moving camera and fluid shot composition, a percussive and pervasive music track and a marked use of slow motion and shots with different depths of field. The decision to apparently fatally wound the leading character Andy Sipowicz in the opening episode, and to include a lengthy sex scene, make clear the programme's ambition to innovate in the police series genre while also connecting it to the heritage of 'quality' work associated particularly with Bochco.

The first and second episodes of *NYPD Blue* were written by David Milch, and shot in a single twenty-day period on sets built in Los Angeles at 20th Century Fox and on location in New York's Lower East Side (see Milch and Clark 1996: 27). Paul Eads was the production designer for the series, aiming for a down-at-heel urban setting for interiors and exteriors. New York location sequences were planned to include recognisable signifiers of place such as parks, the city's skyline or subway stations, where as many as possible of the regular characters would be featured. Having created establishing sequences in this way, a second unit in New York without the presence of performers provided a selection of further establishing shots that could be integrated in post-production. The series' cinematography aimed to recreate the light and colour palette signifying New York in both interior and backlot exteriors in Los Angeles, using backlighting and areas of natural light to signify the strong shadowing created by New York's tall buildings and the leakage of fluorescent or neon lights into both interior and exterior spaces (see Fisher 1996). Light bounced from steel mirrors onto scenes shot on the shadowed side of Los Angeles backlot streets produces the effect of sunlight reflected from unseen buildings, and shooting on Eastman film stock gave stronger contrast. In interiors, performance areas were lit through the motivated apertures in the set (like windows and doors) and choices of lens aimed to compress the space to make it appear smaller, urban and

claustrophobic. By painting the walls of the sets with gloss paint, light in interiors could be bounced off the walls and floor to simulate indirect natural light, and overall the decisions on lighting and setting were made to prioritise verisimilitude of location and a sense of spatial confinement that would match the characters' embattled relationships with their jobs and each other.

These settings establish a sense of place for the series and offer the viewer a consistent understanding of the fictional world as a busy, grimy and morally confusing environment, where the routine processes of police investigation make sense of its complexity only barely, temporarily and at considerable cost to the detectives themselves. The opening of the first episode announces this strongly by combining mobile camera shots in a rapid montage of exteriors and interiors, within which the lead characters are first seen, shot with a consistently muted brown and blue colour palette. Each episode of *NYPD Blue* begins with an opening 'teaser' unique to it, and is then followed by a title sequence common to all the episodes in the series. In the first episode, this teaser is a rapid montage of moving shots that denotes relatively anonymous parts of Manhattan and street scenes with numerous cars and passers-by. Over this sequence, a rhythmic percussion soundtrack is played, and as the sequence concludes there is a series of moving camera shots showing fragments of the exterior of the Criminal Courts Building. It would be conventional in television series episodes for the opening to comprise one or more stable wide shots that denote the location of the subsequent action, often panning along a street then moving in close-up to a specific doorway or window, followed by a cut that implies the narrative's entry into that building for an interior scene. The opening of *NYPD Blue's* first episode abbreviates and fragments this conventional establishing sequence, but does not abandon its role in establishing place. The stylistic choices of moving camera where the subject of the shot is not clearly identifiable, shooting parts rather than the whole of buildings, bridges and streetscapes, and cuts within the montage that are so frequent as to confuse the movement from the generality of the city to the Courts building specifically, are in dialogue with convention but destabilise the viewer's sense of knowing this fictional world with any security.

The first scene presents a courtroom in which Sipowicz is giving evidence against local crime boss Alfonse Giardella (Robert Costanzo). The camera moves restlessly, following the exchange between the Assistant District Attorney Sylvia Costas (Sharon Lawrence) and Sipowicz on the witness stand, and repeatedly breaking the 180-degree rule to shoot from the back, front and each side of the space. Changes of camera position suggest that the camera 'knows' what the characters will do and say next, so that it can be in an appropriate place to show the audience what they say and do from a frontal position. But on the other hand, the camera pans unsteadily as if attempting to place each speaker in a central position within the frame, reframing during the shots and often arriving 'too late' to privilege a speaker at the centre of the frame at the moment they begin to speak. Overall, the camera appears to offer privileged access to the fictional world by being in the right place at the right time. But it lacks sufficient insight into the motivations, intentions and emotions of the characters to anticipate specific moments

in the drama and present them with the assurance that stable camera and harmonious framing would conventionally achieve.

Sipowicz delivers his testimony as if it were thoroughly rehearsed, in a rapid and inexpressive official discourse, but this moves to vehement self-justification as it becomes clear that he illegally searched the boot of Giardella's car by puncturing his tyre with nails to provide an excuse for stopping him. The camera's emphasis is on distinctions of bodily movement as well as the dialogue, representing a contest for authority between the Assistant DA, Giardella's lawyer, James Sinclair (Daniel Benzali) and Sipowicz. Sipowicz is relatively still, even lumpish, on the witness stand, while Costas and Giardella's attorney control the space by moving around in the open floor in front of the judge's bench. A brief long shot introduces John Kelly (David Caruso) who is yet to be identified as Sipowicz's partner, sitting at the back of the court and smiling grimly as the deception is revealed. The climax of the sequence plays out outside the courtroom when Sipowicz asks Costas whether she is accusing him of lying in court, to which she replies with learned authority that she would say 'Res ipsa loquitur' (the matter speaks for itself) if Sipowicz could understand it. Franz's performance physicalises Sipowicz's rejoinder 'Ipsa this, you pissy little bitch' in a quite shocking way by speaking the line as he stands erect and thrusts out his crotch towards her with his hand (Fig. 4.1). This demonstrates his determination to regain his masculine ascendancy over her, and the choice to shoot this moment with both characters facing the camera, with Kelly as a judging onlooker, provides for comparison and evaluation of their expressions and postures. Costas' weary endurance of Sipowicz's sexism and his own desperate need to assert himself are economically communicated by the composition of the shot.

By means of this first scene, the ongoing vendetta of Sipowicz against Giardella is established; Sipowicz's misguided, prejudiced and high-handed personality is introduced; and performance styles conveying varying levels of physical control and sublimated violence set up these issues as the primary undercurrents of the narrative world. The visual style of wandering and restless camera follows character interaction and discursive contests of authority. The editing style counterpoints these mobile close shots with wider shots that permit observation of physical movement, gesture and character interaction. But in both close and more distant shots, off-centre composition and constant reframing, with the apparent uncertainty about the centre of action that this implies, parallel the moral and emotional ambivalence of the fictional world with a corresponding uncertainty of focus embedded in the style.

The main credit sequence, following the episode-specific opening teaser discussed above, remained the same across the first season and signalled the series' interest in New York as a confusing, racially diverse environment that has been associated with violent crime. Representations signifying New York much more clearly than the shots of the



Fig. 4.1

city described in the teaser were combined with still shots of the main characters, each captioned with the actor's name. The prominence of the actors in the credit sequence draws attention to the significance of performers in a way that the credit sequence of *Miami Vice*, for example, did not. The sequence opens with a shot of the 'El' elevated railway at night as a train thunders past, followed by shots that include the demolition of an apartment block and the busy entrance of a subway station. These are interspersed with shots of the detective team and other main characters such as Kelly's estranged wife, Laura (Sherry Stringfield), and fragments representing police work such as a crime scene attended by uniformed officers and a police patrol car. The sequence closes with the white and red lights of distant cars on a freeway at night, the fireworks, traditional drumming and dragon costumes of a Chinatown festival and finally the dark tunnel of a subway seen from a train driver's cab. The music for the sequence comprises the percussion rhythm identified in the opening establishing teaser, together with an overlaid woodwind motif in a minor key with occasional intrusions of found sounds including police sirens. The sense of New York as a multi-ethnic, noisy and messy environment is connoted by these fragments of busy streetscapes, forms of transportation and crowds of people, and the percussion itself is to some extent motivated by its components (train sounds, drums, fireworks). The slow woodwind melody suggests an ageing urban fabric (as opposed to the choice of a synthesiser or electric guitar, for example) and a weary, dispirited mood that matches the grim expressions of the main characters in the sequence's stills and their placement in the untidy and dully-coloured settings of the squad room.

Greg Hoblit was the producer for the whole of the first season and also directed some of the episodes, ensuring continuity in the style of the series. In later seasons, the introduction of newer producers and multiple directors gave greater creative autonomy to the cinematographers responsible for the continuities in the distinctive visual look of the series. The cinematographer working on the series from the eighth episode onwards was Bob Reynolds, who described in an interview (in Fisher 1996) how by the time of his involvement a style of camerawork had been embedded into the aesthetic template of the programme. In his view, the style of filming used throughout the first season derives from imagining the camera to be a participant character in the scenes, present as an unacknowledged onlooker. However, as we have seen in the discussion of the courtroom scene, the camera is positioned not as if it were the ocular point of view of a character familiar with the people and places that it witnesses. Instead, the camera is able to anticipate passages of action but without the precision of framing and composition that would enable it to have mastery over the fictional world and deliver knowledge of that world confidently to the audience. In this respect, the camera's role is parallel to that of the detectives, who are competent and effective but also unable to master their environment and their own emotional and moral problems.

The effect of the directorial style of the series on establishing shots and the begin-

nings of scenes is often to diminish the emphasis in the shot composition on what or who will become the centre of the dramatic action. In Fig. 4.2, for example, in which Kelly arrives at the precinct house, the camera is shooting through the chain-link fence of a small public playground across the street, and Kelly is obscured not only by this but also the parked police vehicles and then some of the officers standing outside the building. In scenes with several performers, like this one, the effect is to greatly diminish the conventional television practice of offering a master shot of the action in a scene supplemented by singles, two-shots and close-ups. In the brief sequence showing Kelly's arrival, the camera tracks his movement as if it were the subjective point of view of someone behind the fence, trying to pick Kelly out from among the vehicles and police officers. This locates Kelly at the station-house in preparation for the subsequent dialogue scene, thus operating as an establishing shot, but the decision to place the camera behind the fence rather than in front of it, leaving the wire mesh in shot, works together with camera movement and reframing to introduce a sense of difficulty and uncertainty in the camera's and the viewer's access to space and significance. The series producer Greg Hoblit labelled this the 'flicking eye' technique or 'dektoring' (after the prominent US director of television commercials Leslie Dektor; see Fisher 1996), and in the early seasons this shooting style was *NYPD Blue's* distinctive trademark. The fluid camera style is hardly ever hand-held though it might appear so, and was created by using a wheeled dolly and a Sachtler camera mounting which has settings that variably resist jerky camera movement, allowing levels of panning or tilting speed and smoothness to be adjusted either for stability or a deliberate approximation of hand-held camera wobble. As versions of this style began to be adopted by other network series, the impact of the style became less significant and by the later 1990s Reynolds diminished its vigour while still aiming for an aggressive prominence of camera movement. In contrast to *Homicide: Life on the Street*, aesthetic stylisation throughout the series was orientated around the moving camera's attempts to locate the centre of action in space (by means of what Reynolds (in Fisher 1996) called a 'fishing pass'), or following character dynamics in a dialogue scene where whip-pans, focus pulls and reframing match the byplay of interaction or suggest the shifts in power evident in a confrontation between characters.

The visual style of *NYPD Blue* raises again the epistemological issues discussed in earlier chapters of this study, which have explored the ways in which the police genre's focus on the acquisition of knowledge and processes of moral evaluation are connected with style and narration. *NYPD Blue* has partial knowledge of its fictional world and its characters, rather than total access to them. The ways the camera is used to demon-



Fig. 4.2

strate this are sometimes described by suggesting that the camera represents a character, because this suggests the embedding of the camera within the fiction but also the camera's limited mastery over the drama's progress. In an example given by Reynolds (in Fisher 1996) referring to his work with the later pairing of Franz with Jimmy Smits (playing Bobby Simone) as the series' protagonists, the camera might show that Sipowicz is looking for a newspaper by tilting down from a mid-shot of him, following the direction of his glance, to see one on a desk. Tilting up to see Sipowicz point to Smits in a wordless request for the newspaper, pans back and forth between them are shot wide enough to show Smits pick up the newspaper and hand it to Sipowicz as he walks past, all in a single shot. In this wordless exchange, the relationships between the two policemen are communicated by their interaction in a shared space and a shared shot, without cuts back and forth between each of them or to the newspaper. While the camera cannot anticipate or fully know their thoughts, its movement between them and around the space is motivated by a sense that observing such simple details brings the camera and the viewer both physically and emotionally close to them in the context of a seamless passage of time and action.

Studio sets for the series were made to provide the actors with relatively realistic spaces in which to perform, where rooms were constructed with ceilings, and scenes were played beginning to end several times, shot from different camera positions, in order to allow continuity of performance for the actors. Cutting between these different set-ups, together with the tendency to keep the camera moving as it reframes the actors and follows their movement, produces the overall effect of bringing the viewer close-up with the actors' performances, but also of troubling the viewer's access to the drama. The detectives are themselves not wholly in control of their relationships with each other, or their professional and personal lives, thus aligning their rather precarious knowledge of themselves and their world with the viewer's restricted access to them. The extent to which Sipowicz is unable to control himself or his surroundings is shown by the events leading up to his shooting, and the shooting itself, towards the end of the episode. These scenes are filmed in different ways, and continue the pattern of giving and withholding knowledge. Narratively, it is shockingly unconventional for a main character such as Sipowicz to be apparently fatally wounded in the first episode of a new police series. Some of this surprise is also communicated at the level of style by the intensification of privileged access and also the denial of access that have been discussed so far.

The narrative progression towards Sipowicz's shooting begins when he retreats to Patrick's Bar to drink a long series of whiskies after the opening courtroom scene. He is confronted by Kelly about his drinking and Kelly refuses to keep covering for his partner's inadequacies. Kelly visits his estranged wife, where a sub-plot involving robberies in her apartment building is introduced. Sipowicz confronts Giardella in a restaurant, goads him about his toupee and forces him at gunpoint into the street where they tussle, interrupted by Kelly who rescues Sipowicz from further trouble. Next day, Kelly meets Detective

Janice Licalsi (Amy Brenneman) to arrange surveillance of his wife's apartment block. Sipowicz admits his failings, is interviewed by Internal Affairs and is suspended from duty. The depressed and defiant Sipowicz reacts by going with Lois (Shannon Cochran), a prostitute he knows and meets on another visit to Patrick's Bar, to her apartment where Giardella shoots him several times in the back and legs in a pre-arranged assassination attempt.

In this scene, Franz's performance emphasises Sipowicz's physical decay and grotesqueness, drunk, chain-smoking, overweight and balding, approaching physical and psychological collapse in a parallel and opposite movement to the similarly overweight, balding and crude Giardella's triumph over him. Sipowicz is on the bed with Lois in his inelegant singlet, shirt and boxer shorts, as Lois comforts him and initiates sex. Remaining close to Sipowicz's pallid and sweating body as he descends

further into degradation by exploiting Lois seems at first to amplify the withdrawal of the audience's sympathy for him, initiated by his lying on the courtroom witness stand and then his evident alcoholism and dependency on Kelly covering-up for him. The camera roams over their bodies in mid-shot, tilting slightly upward to notice Giardella's arrival in the room. After an exchange of insults, the sequence moves into step-printed slow motion as the camera witnesses Giardella's gunshots from a position close to Sipowicz's optical point of view, reversing to show Sipowicz catapulted back into the wall (Fig. 4.3), then falling onto the bed as further shots hit his back and buttocks. Slow synthesised chords in a descending phrase accompany the sequence as Sipowicz lies face-down on the bed, barely moving. The impact depends on the sudden abandonment of the episode's rapid speed of information delivery and rapid pace of cutting and camera movement. Focusing on Sipowicz's body almost exclusively, the sequence leaves little room for doubt that he has been killed.

This remarkable narrative turning-point is emphasised by the adoption of a different visual style from what has preceded it, and is very reminiscent in both visual style and narrative impact of the slowed-down shooting of Hill and Renko in the pilot episode of *Hill Street Blues* (see chapter one). But showing Sipowicz as a victim, lying lumpishly on the bed in his underwear with bloody wounds in his back and buttocks, modifies the feeling of revulsion for his physical and moral decay. Instead he becomes much more sympathetic, since Giardella's actions are excessively violent, and Sipowicz has been deliberately lured into vulnerability by Lois who is revealed to have been complicit with Giardella in setting him up. The emotional tone shifts from revulsion for Sipowicz to revulsion for the fictional world in which he could suffer such self-disgust, moral degradation and violent retribution. The slowing-down of the sequence at its end, finishing with



Fig. 4.3



Fig. 4.4

cate Kelly as he arrives and follows his movement towards Sipowicz's body. However, the action is partially and sometimes fully obscured by a large number of obstacles in the frame, which include police vehicles parked across the street, barriers protecting the crime scene, uniformed officers, bystanders and detectives who stand there uselessly and look around in distress (Fig. 4.4). Moreover the camera's panning movements and occasional shifts in focus convey its lack of privileged access to the action, as if it occupies the point of view of a member of the public being held back from the crime scene. This develops the series' characteristic use of the camera as an observer, but at the same time the camera's attempts to identify and isolate Kelly as he moves towards the body demonstrate that the camera is aware of his significance as Sipowicz's partner and friend. Placing the camera amid the clutter of the street scene situates the drama firmly within the spatial context of New York and the confusing street-level activity that can be seen at its most dense from the waist-level position and with the deep focus lenses used here. Overlapping planes of people and objects seen against a busy and detailed background thematise the problems of making sense of this milieu and of the excessive violence that erupts from the vendetta between Sipowicz and Giardella. The problems of seeing through these layers of foreground and background action, like the camera's attempts to centre subjects in the frame, dramatise epistemological issues stylistically.

The lighting system adopted in the series as a whole makes some of the problems of identifying the significant visual elements within a shot less difficult for the viewer. Its effect is to exaggerate contrasts of light and dark, 'hot' and 'cool' colour temperatures, and to produce the series' dominant colour signatures of blue, brown and green. By developing a relatively dull colour palette, bright colour achieves greater significance. So the red sweater of Donna Abandando (Gail O'Grady), the glamorous precinct secretary, marks her out from her surroundings, for example, and in exteriors yellow police crime-scene tape or red blood appear more emphatic. Reynolds reported (in Fisher 1996) that the final arbiter of visual style was Bochco himself, who supported experimentation with low light or long lenses, for example, as long as they matched his aesthetic vision for the series. An example of this kind of experimentation occurs after Kelly has confronted

the still mid-shot of Sipowicz on the bed, allows a space for contemplation and reflection, and seems to indicate the end of the episode.

The shooting is not the end of the episode, however, and the following scene centres on Kelly's arrival as Sipowicz's body, covered by a sheet, is brought from the doorway to a waiting ambulance, accompanied by the same slow music as the shooting scene and completely without dialogue. The camera is positioned in the street, some metres from the action, and a series of pans and cuts lo-

Giardella's mafia boss Angelo Merino (Joe Santos), and news arrives that Sipowicz is alive. Kelly and Licalsi go back to Kelly's apartment and have sex, only to be interrupted by a visit from Kelly's wife wishing to sympathise over Sipowicz's shooting.

A series of dissolves, in contrast to the cuts used in all other scenes of the episode, abbreviates Kelly's and Licalsi's arrival and initial kissing in his apartment, before they undress and begin to make love accompanied by a non-diegetic pop song. The scene is shot in very low light, with motivated high-lights from an open window picking out the curves of their naked bodies in a series of mid-shots and close-ups. The highly aestheticised sequence uses the same colour palette as the majority of scenes in the episode, emphasising blue in the room's curtains which are lit as if by a neon sign outside it, and brown in the skin tones of the actors' smooth naked bodies (Fig. 4.5). But here the tone of the sequence is completely different from either the urban drama of policing, or the otherwise closely related sex scene involving Sipowicz and Lois. The dramatic function of the scene is to represent Kelly's desire for release from the day's traumatic events, and Licalsi's attraction to Kelly who she perceives as a role-model (though it will later be revealed that she is in the pay of Giardella's boss, Merino). Its visual style contrasts with the grittiness of the preceding scenes and corresponds to aestheticised portrayals of the body in other media such as magazine photography and advertising.

The way that the style of the scene positions the audience is interesting because the scene's relative length, its use of dissolves and its unusually smooth camera movements contrast with the rest of the episode. Although the lighting system is similar, the love song laid over the scene is quite different in mood from the percussive sound used elsewhere and suggests both romance and the narrative's willingness to endorse the relationship between Kelly and Licalsi. The first part of the scene seems calculated to lull the audience into an acceptance of the narrative's shift to Kelly rather than Sipowicz, and encourage an eroticised mode of engagement with the action. But while the couple are in bed Kelly's wife arrives at his door, and the music and visual style change to a relatively conventional shot/reverse-shot exchange between her (clad in dark-coloured outdoor clothing) and Kelly whose nakedness is partially covered by a white sheet. She has come to sympathise with Kelly, having heard that Sipowicz has been shot, but realising what Kelly has been doing she leaves angrily. The romanticised and seductive tone of the beginning of the scene is thus marked as a digression and a diversion from the emotional path of the episode as a whole, which is centred on the relationship between Kelly and Sipowicz and is about their different reactions to their physical, professional and emotional worlds. The audience's luring into this erotic and sensuously-shot sequence is



Fig. 4.5

parallel with Kelly's inappropriate choice of consolatory sex with Licalsi, and also Sipowicz's doomed consolatory sex with Lois. A moral issue about the detectives disengaging with the struggle to do their job and to connect with each other has been pointed out by the episode's stylistic and narrative disengagement from its established systems.

Characterisation, and the interweaving of workplace storylines with the precinct officers' personal lives was as important to the aesthetic of the series as its camerawork and editing. Sipowicz became involved with Sylvia Costas, who in the first episode he insulted after his blatant lying on the witness stand; Kelly had a relationship with Licalsi; the shy Detective Greg Medavoy (Gordon Clapp) became involved with the unit's glamorous secretary Abandando, and detectives James Martinez (Nicholas Turturro) and Adrienne Lesniak (Justine Micelli) paired up with each other. These pairings blurred the boundaries between workplace and domestic lives, demonstrating the importance of characterisation and the creation of evolving character arcs over episode-specific crime

storylines. But working relationships between men – and especially between the central pair of detectives – rather than the romantic involvements, are the series' key focus. In this episode, for example, after Kelly meets Giardella's gangland boss Marino to turn down his offer to punish Giardella himself, Licalsi secretly meets Marino who arranges for her to kill Kelly. Her role is to be an instrument of a struggle between the two men.

The most satisfying emotional encounter is between the two male detectives, in the closing scene

of the episode in which Kelly visits Sipowicz in hospital. The camera is unusually still in the scene, with relatively long takes assembled in a conventional shot/reverse-shot sequence. Kelly tells Sipowicz that he is 'like a father to me', and the scene ends with a long close-up on Kelly's and Sipowicz's hands in which the apparently unconscious Sipowicz begins to clasp his partner's hand firmly, demonstrating that he is beginning a recovery (Fig. 4.6). The camera's unusual effacement of its own agency in this scene clearly serves to prioritise the relationship of the two men over any stylistic interest that the scene's direction might otherwise offer. This is especially true of the scene's long close-up on the hands, which is held for several seconds and centred in the frame.

The first episode of *NYPD Blue* is a bold statement of the series' interest in combining different kinds of visual style that respond in different ways to the generic components of the police series form. The use of fragments of the city environment, in close shots with little or no contextualisation by wide establishing shots, works alongside very prominent camera movement in the early parts of the episode to portray New York as a spatially confusing place for the viewer. As the drama begins to centre on the main characters, this tendency for unsteady camera and constant reframing becomes located more on

character interaction than setting, and introduces the narrative motif of incomplete knowledge of these characters since the camera appears not to be able to anticipate the progress of character interactions. Framing characters harmoniously in conventional and stable shot compositions seems to be the ambition of the camera, but one that it cannot easily fulfill. Dramatic turning points like Sipowicz's shooting, Kelly's sexual encounter and his visit to Sipowicz in hospital are shot in ways that contrast with this because, respectively, they are characterised by slow motion, lengthy stable shots connected by dissolves rather than cuts and a long and stable sequence of shot/reverse-shots and the close-up on the men's hands. The choices made in visual style therefore work to centre narrative emphasis on the characters' feelings rather than their actions, by highlighting these moments where they suffer, make poor moral choices or momentarily experience emotional connection with each other. It is commonplace in the police genre to develop storylines about buddy relationships that enable the protagonists to survive a morally ambiguous fictional world, displacing certainty about how to make sense of that world onto the security of masculine friendship. The opening episode of *NYPD Blue* centres on this generic motif, but its visual style tends to hold the viewer at a distance from the fictional world by drawing attention to the camera's agency in presenting it. The effect of this is to give extreme weight to moments of emotional connection, such as the final close-up on the clasping of the men's hands, where the narrative significance of the moment is matched by its being fully accessible to the camera. For the viewer, these experiences of different kinds of access to the material and emotional world of the drama make the programme much more satisfying than a more conventional rendering of its generic components would be.



Fig. 4.6

5. *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*

The series *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* has been the tent pole programme in the CBS network's schedule for the most significant weekday evening, Thursdays, screened in the one-hour slot beginning at 9.00pm. In the 2001–02 season (its second year), *CSI* achieved the second-best ratings of any programme and in the following year was the top-rated programme. It is currently still being made and broadcast, has spawned the spin-off series *CSI: Miami* and *CSI: NY*, and contributed significantly to the profile and audiences for Five when shown in the UK (see Bignell 2007b) as part of a strip of acquired US police series that were collectively labelled 'America's Finest'.

CSI was created by Anthony Zuicker who established its format, and is jointly produced by the Hollywood film production company run by Jerry Bruckheimer whose films (*Beverly Hills Cop* (1984), *Top Gun* (1986), *Days of Thunder* (1990)) share some of its interest in 'cool' masculinity. The writer/producer Danny Cannon was the most regularly employed director in the series, and had an important influence on its visual style of strong primary colours and frequent use of extreme close-ups of bodily injury (see Tait 2006). Though the series format is constructed around a 'work family' that develops the sense of a precinct community discussed in earlier chapters, *CSI* is primarily structured through paired buddy teams and dual storylines in each episode. In common with *Homicide*, it is much less about the commission of crimes than the process of solving them, in this case through forensic research using 'traditional' kinds of investigation like autopsy, but also high-tech computer simulations and complex scientific analyses. The focus on the technologies of forensic investigation leads to a preponderance of storylines about murder, missing persons, sexual crime and violent accidental death.

Visual style in *CSI* was consciously designed to ensure the differentiation of the series from competing programmes, drawing audiences to it because of its distinctiveness. Roy Wagner, *CSI*'s first director of photography, recalled: 'Bruckheimer had demanded a show so stylistically different that a channel-surfing audience would be forced to stop and view the unusual looking images' (in Lury 2005: 38). Rapid zooms towards and inside body parts or items of evidence (often at extreme magnification; see Fig. 5.1) are integrated with computer-generated imagery to 'demonstrate' aspects of a crime. The main techniques used include ultra-close-up photography, 360-degree shooting using motion control cameras and ultra-high-speed



Fig. 5.1

cinematography for extreme slow motion, as well as the more conventional effects work of matte painting and construction of functioning ('practical') props representing body parts (see Feeny 2003). The resulting effects sequences are hybrids of in-camera and digital effects, which are blended as seamlessly as possible together and also blended

with live-action footage that introduces and concludes them. This innovatively develops the notion of vision as an evidential-investigative-conclusive activity in the police genre, since it is by looking in specialised ways that the *CSI* team examine evidence, draw inferences and identify perpetrators.

Although the footage for *CSI*'s first season was shot in the cinematic 16:9 ratio, it was initially broadcast in the USA and also on Five in Britain in academy 4:3 ratio. Since on a television screen the width of the image is difficult to exploit for striking compositions because it is similar to the image's height, shots emphasise depth rather than breadth by zooms or camera movements that take the viewer closer into the image, as 'CSI shots' like Fig. 5.1 do. The interior studio sets of the programme extensively use glass, chrome and other reflective or metallic surfaces, so that one office area can be seen through another and background action can be seen while primary action takes place in the foreground. The effect is to layer spaces one in front of another, emphasising both depth of space and the activities of looking, reflecting and observing that are crucial to the processes of investigation carried out by the characters (see Lury 2005: 47). Within settings, there are often coloured lights in the background of shots which draw the eye from the foreground to the background action and back, enhancing the sense of depth. Film lights are equipped with gels that wash the action with colour, and post-production tinting is used to add a green, red or blue overlay, for example, to whole sequences as later analysis of scenes in 'Blood Drops' will discuss. Establishing shots emphasise colour saturation, for example by aerial shots of white residential housing, or the black night sky of Las Vegas with its brightly illuminated hotels and casinos.

A close analysis of sequences from the seventh first-season episode 'Blood Drops' (sometimes referred to by its alternative title, 'If These Walls Could Talk') develops the issues of looking, identifying and knowing that have been highlighted throughout this study. It has been chosen not because it is especially representative, but because its single main storyline reduces the need to explain plot complications, leaving space to discuss visual style in relation to format and *CSI*'s distinctive features. The storyline of the episode is based around the investigation of the murder of both parents and the two young male children of a suburban family. The two daughters, one a promiscuous teenager and the other a young girl, survive. Investigation reveals that the older daughter, Tina (Allison Lange), persuaded one of her boyfriends to stab the family members because she was abused by her father when much younger and neither her mother nor brothers protected her. Her motivation is not only to avenge this, but also to protect the younger daughter Brenda (Dakota Fanning) who is already becoming the object of her father's sexual attention. Furthermore, Brenda is actually Tina's daughter by her own father, as well as her sister. In subsidiary storylines, the *CSI* team's leader Gil Grissom (William Petersen) engages in a rivalry with the head of the day shift, Conrad Ecklie (Marc Vann), and Grissom's colleague Catherine Willows (Marg Helgenberger) is accused of neglecting her daughter by her estranged husband, Eddie (Timothy Carhart), and he also accuses her of having a relationship with Grissom. The *CSI* investigator Sara Sidle (Jorja

Fox) complains that she is being used simply as a childminder to look after Brenda but gradually establishes a quasi-maternal relationship with the girl.

It may already be evident from this brief summary that the narrative of the episode is held together by a few structural patterns. The CSI team is a 'work family' headed by the patriarchal figure of Grissom. His authority in this role is challenged by the chief of the day shift, but vindicated by the solving of the crime. Willows is accused of having an improper sexual relationship with Grissom which would transgress the conventions of this 'family', and this parallels the transgressive incestuous relationship between Tina (and Brenda) and her father. Willows struggles to maintain her maternal role, at one point arriving too late to collect her daughter from ballet class because of her absorption in tracing the position of blood drops at the crime scene. This questions the relationship between familial and work roles, and the scope for feminine activity alongside professional (in some ways masculine) responsibility. Sidle, too, begins by repudiating a maternal role, but gradually accepts one in relation to Brenda. Across the episode, the propriety of family relations and its ordering of gender roles is addressed both by the crime itself, which is motivated by improper sexual behaviour in a family, and in the familial hierarchy and inter-dependency of the CSI team.

This pattern of narrative strands centring on family, authority and sexuality is reinforced by a series of allusions by Grissom to *Macbeth*. *Macbeth* concerns a breach of hierarchy in which Macbeth murders his king, transgressing patriarchal and institutional structures. This reflects on both Grissom's rivalry with the day shift commander, and also the young murderer Jesse Overton (Eric Nenninger) and Tina's killing of the head of the family. Lady Macbeth encourages her husband to commit the crime, and is presented as an 'unnatural' woman who overreaches the conventional maternal or spousal roles set up in the drama. In 'Blood Drops', Tina persuades her boyfriend to commit the crimes, and is an 'unnatural' daughter who has 'unnaturally' become a mother, though this is because of her abuse by her father and her mother's and brothers' complicity in it. *Macbeth* is notable for its linguistic and (in performance) physical representation of blood, through verbal descriptions of King Duncan's body and the presence on stage of the bloody corpse of Macbeth's companion Banquo, for example. Several visual sequences and lines of dialogue in 'Blood Drops' make blood prominent. Grissom observes in the house that there is a strong smell of copper, indicating 'lots of blood'. He and Willows initially agree that first the mother was killed in her sleep, then the father was killed in the hallway as he ran to protect his children. The CSI team's narrative of the crime is incomplete and incorrect, however, because they agree there is 'not enough blood' to justify this theory. Grissom examines Tina's clothes and says, 'This is a Lady Macbeth', which he explains as a reference to the line in the play 'Out, out damned spot', about removing bloodstains. Searching the young killer's house, the bloody pair of jeans he wore are found in the rubbish bin. Grissom remarks, 'Who would have thought the old man had so much blood in him', quoting from *Macbeth* again. These linguistic allusions are supported by the many camera shots of blood drops, the family's bloody bodies, the killer's bloody jeans and photographs of bleeding bodies or blood-covered items of evidence.

The episode begins with three brief shots of Las Vegas at night, each separated by a white flash that recalls the camera flash of a crime scene photograph, seeing the city from overhead and showing the colourfully illuminated casinos and hotels of the downtown area. These minimal establishing shots are followed by a wide shot of the front lawn of a suburban house at night. The camera is positioned at ground level, shooting across the lawn towards the front door. A young woman (Tina) emerges screaming and there is a cut to a mobile shot following her running across the street to bang on her neighbours' door. Another cut, to the inside of Grissom's car, elides time and establishes his arrival at the crime scene. Grissom and the viewer are given initial information about the crime by the duty detective in a sequence of brief shot/reverse-shots. The episode's opening teaser has thus established place, time, Grissom's role as protagonist and the bloody killing of a suburban family. While the camera was present before Tina emerges into shot, suggesting its privileged access to the space of the action, the reason for her running towards the camera in panic is withheld from the viewer. As the episode develops, this pattern of introducing information and aligning the viewer with Grissom and the other CSI investigators as they try to understand it continues.

The main title sequence follows, and introduces the central characters along with captions identifying the actors. Each performer is seen in role, undertaking an aspect of their CSI work. Grissom looks up from peering into a microscope, Sidle lifts a fingerprint using adhesive tape and the detective working with the CSI team, Captain Jim Brass (Paul Guilfoyle), holds up a personnel file, for example. Interspersed between these shots the screen shows metonymic examples of the scientific and physical work of the team, where the camera is not anchored to any character's point of view. Many of the shots illustrate scientific processes, such as an electronically enhanced visual scan of a piece of hair (Fig. 5.2), a microscopic investigation of two bullet fragments whose matching striated marks show that they came from the same gun (Fig. 5.3), and a magnified close-up of an entry wound on the grey skin of a dead body. The linkage between technology and the body is made by the juxtaposition of these enhanced modes of seeing, where actual

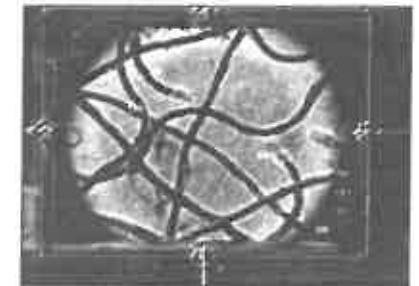


Fig. 5.2

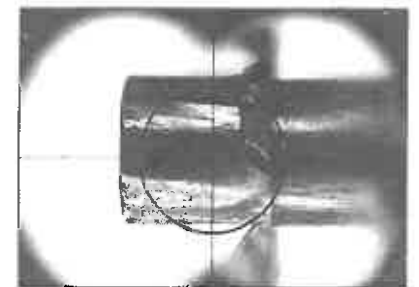


Fig. 5.3



Fig. 5.4

or simulated body parts are being investigated. The most lengthy sequence in the titles emphasises this, and is a montage in which Grissom raises a golf club over his head and brings it forward, cutting to a model of a human head which is impacted by the club and spurts artificial blood upwards into the frame (Fig. 5.4). The music that always accompanies the sequence (but is omitted from DVD sets of the first series) is the song 'Who Are You?' by The Who. The powerful guitar chords, contrasting with some quieter keyboard passages, and its insistent beat, provide a dramatic and exciting accompaniment to the images. The song's understated beginning and gradual escalation towards a crescendo of powerful guitar chords corresponds to the slow building-together of evidence and then climactic revelation that the CSI team's work can accomplish. The lyrics, whose refrain culminates in the line 'Who, who, who are you?', pick out a central premise of the series, which consists in the identification of dead bodies and the search for the identities of perpetrators of crime.

As the previous three illustrations show, the title sequence itself contains several images that set circular shapes within the rectilinear borders of the television screen. These reference the circular lenses of the microscopes and still cameras that the investigators use, as well as representations of the human eye. The lenses of microscopes are represented by circular iris shadows in Figs 5.2 and 5.3, and even the shape of the model head in Fig. 5.4 resembles a circle. The analysis of the episode discussed here argues for *CSI*'s reflexivity about seeing, and the uses of both careful optical observation and seeing that is enhanced by special investigative technologies. In this context, it can also be asserted that circular iris-like shapes in the title sequence and in the episode refer the viewer reflexively to these questions of seeing in relation to knowledge, by drawing attention to the activity of looking through or into a demarcated visual field. By adopting the same circular form for this frame and some of the objects that are framed by it, however, the motif also suggests that differentiating and discriminating between the things that can be seen might be problematic. For if many things are circular the significance of circularity diminishes, and this problem of reading evidence correctly continues through the visual motifs adopted specifically in the 'Blood Drops' episode.

As 'Blood Drops' continues, the camera is close to Grissom's point of view as he walks around illuminating parts of the interior of the house. The sequence aligns the viewer with Grissom, but emphasises his lack of knowledge about this space by surrounding him with darkness that contrasts strongly with the fragments of the visual field that his torch illuminates. Grissom's flashlight tilts up to a hand-enhanced photograph that shows the family in a generic pose emphasising their happiness and unity (Fig. 5.5). The small circle of light begins on the left of the photograph on the two male children, before panning right to dwell on the



Fig. 5.5

two parents and their two daughters. Again, a circular pattern represents Grissom's investigating gaze, contrasting it with the persistent darkness of the scene. Just as Grissom has to find his way through the house to the location of the bodies, the camera does too and the effect of very low lighting is to make the house labyrinthine, paralleling the viewer with both Grissom and the camera. The presence of the photograph capturing the appearance of the smiling family now destroyed by murder, and the fearful reactions of the policeman accompanying Grissom that contrast with his own calmness, all serve to generate a sense of the uncanny, of displacement and anxious expectation. Sidle arrives with her own torch, providing slightly more illumination in the scene, and they discover a swirling circular mark on the wall (and another is found later). Sidle wonders whether this is a calling-card left by a cult killer such as a member of the Manson 'family', recalling for some viewers a recurring storyline about a serial killer, Millander, who the CSI team have been unable to capture. The sense that something mysterious has yet to be seen and understood is conveyed in visual ways, as well as through dialogue and the intratextual reference to Millander.

The characteristic darkness of many sequences of *CSI* is demonstrated here, achieved in the first season by simulating the procedure of bleach bypass in the digital post-production phase of making *CSI*. The effect of bleach bypass is to exaggerate colour contrasts and shadows during film processing, by skipping the bleaching stage in the colour processing sequence, and thus to retain silver along with the film's chemical colour dyes. The result is in effect the superimposition of a monochrome image over the film's colour image, increasing contrast and darkening shadows, and sometimes bringing out the grain of the film's surface. This choice of technical process was part of the series creators' desire to evoke a mood of edginess by leaving areas of the frame so dark that parts of the action and setting cannot be seen. This restricts knowledge of the fictional world for the viewer and the protagonists, and suggests that such knowledge may be difficult or impossible to acquire. Grissom's and Sidle's movement through the house with the flashlight, providing very restricted visual access to the space for them and the camera, parallels the narrative's focus on a slow process of knowledge acquisition, creating and testing hypotheses as new evidence is gained.

Moving further into the bedroom, Grissom and Sidle discover the body of the mother, killed in her sleep. As well as a low undercurrent of synthesizer music during this scene, on the discovery of the mother's body there is the distinct noise of female exhalation on the soundtrack, signifying the last breath of the mother in non-diegetic sound. While this seems like an interpretive element added by the episode's narrating agency, providing a version of the mother's last moments of life, it is immediately marked by the dialogue as a representation of Grissom's and Sidle's shared experience. Asked by Grissom whether she feels something, Sidle replies that 'Her soul is still in the room', so the breath can be reinterpreted both as a sign of their emotions and also a narrative intervention which represents the death scene as they imagine it. However, Grissom's intuition and sensitivity is then harnessed as useful professionalism when he says, 'There's something

else'. His instinct is confirmed as the duo push open Brenda's bedroom door, where they discover the bodies of the two boys. Outside the house, Grissom speaks to Brenda in a shot/reverse-shot exchange in which all she will say is that the sole person who came into her room was 'the buffalo', which sets up one of the key enigmas of the episode as a question about what or who 'the buffalo' might be. Since Brenda is a little girl who is too inarticulate and traumatised to communicate this, it is up to the CSI team to use their forensic skills to solve the mystery. While interviews and other dialogue-based investigative techniques are components of 'Blood Drops', what can be seen at the crime scene, then tested and analysed at the lab where the camera can see these processes, is much more central to its processes of narration.

The circle of Grissom's torch picks out footprints on the kitchen linoleum and he brings out his first piece of equipment, an electrostatic dust print lifter, prompting the accompanying detective to joke that 'You guys have all the best toys' and drawing attention to the importance of technology to investigatory processes in the series. A time ellipse finds the group back at the house in daytime, in a largely wordless scene accompanied by upbeat synthesized music. Here the camera is present as CSI team members discover in the garden the tyre print of a bicycle, a cigarette end and a used match. One of the three

young men who share the bicycle whose tyre print was discovered is then interviewed by another CSI team member, Warrick Brown (Gary Dourdan). The youth has cigarettes with him that match the stub found at the crime scene, and also matches that resemble the one found there. This clue is visually established by another point-of-view shot through a microscope where a circular iris marks the borders of its visual field (Fig. 5.6). In his laboratory, Grissom retrieves a bloody pendant worn by the dead father, and removes the blood to reveal that it is a disc on



Fig. 5.6

which there is an image of a buffalo. Grissom then orders Sidle to take photographs of Brenda's body that can be enhanced to reveal signs of physical abuse.

While Grissom cleans and identifies the buffalo pendant, the camera provides close-ups of the object, making clear not only the process of gathering knowledge but also the similarity between the CSI team's methods of close visual examination and the episode's visual style. One of the functions of the close-up, and especially the zoom into an object or body in *CSI*, is to link the camera as narrating agency with the agency of the human characters. In fact, the relative paucity of conventional physical action in the series is related to this by parallelism and opposition. The stillness and reticence of the characters are parallel and opposite to the fluidity and revelation given to the camera and its narrative agency in the sequences representing forensic investigation. This also sets up a relationship between present and past. The present is characterised by its stillness, seen

especially in the *CSI* operatives' absorption in their work and the literal stillness of dead bodies or evidential objects. But this stillness is made to reveal movement and passion that happened in the past. From the evidence of the buffalo pendant, Grissom and the rest of the team are able to hypothesise that the crime was in some way motivated by the pendant-wearer's relationship with Brenda, hence Grissom's order to Sidle to take photographs of the girl's body. In doing justice to the evidence, the forensic reconstruction of the process of the crime in *CSI* gives a body or an object back its story.

It is Willows who establishes the temporal and spatial sequence of the crime, in a scene where she maps out the directional lines of the killer's and victims' movements in the house on a large board. She makes notes by speaking into a Dictaphone, thus revealing her process of thought to the audience. Point-of-view close-ups follow the movement of her gaze as she looks concentratedly at the board, working out who must have been where according to the evidence of blood spatter that was gathered at the crime scene. The camera is closely aligned with Willows as she systematically examines the map of the crime scene to reveal its secrets, paralleling the activity of the forensic investigators with the activity of the camera. Willows telephones Grissom to tell him that a single blood drop found in the hall shows the direction of travel of the killer, and demonstrates that the father was not running to Brenda's room to protect her but was instead coming out of her bedroom when he was murdered. This dialogue information occurs at the point when the camera, again adopting Willows' optical point of view, closes up on a photograph of the blood drop (Fig. 5.7), emphasising the significance of the detail by shooting through an internal frame created by the circular magnifying glass that she holds. Here the vaguely elliptical blood drop is not a circle, and the lateral spread that deforms its otherwise circular shape is the key to the sequence of past events in the house because the spread indicates direction of movement. While Willows is talking on the phone, a reprise of her imagined reconstruction of the sequence of events shows the killer again attacking the father as he leaves Brenda's room and walks down the hallway (Fig. 5.8). Often in *CSI*, sequences like this restage a crime in the manner of a conventional flashback, or an injury to the victim's body is analytically re-enacted by means of digital effects, prosthetics and models so that the causal processes that gave rise to injuries become knowable. The present is therefore known by restoring a past that leads



Fig. 5.7



Fig. 5.8

to it, or what is seen in the present is explained by reconstructing past events that the viewer is privileged to witness, although none of the CSI team could have seen them.

The process of thinking through the crime using her map thus leads Willows to mentally reconstruct the process of events as she imagines them, so one form of visualisation gives rise to another. Neither the map nor Willows' visualisation of the events are 'true', but are versions of the crime that move closer to what must have happened. The attribution of the reconstruction to Willows is indicated by adopting some different choices of visual style from the main body of the episode. In flashback reconstructions like this, camera movements in circles and tilts are much more common than in the slow and relatively stable camera movement of primary action. In the case of the visualisation being discussed here, the camera is positioned just above floor level, tilting sharply upward to witness the father, the killer behind him and the father's falling movement towards the camera. The new, but still partial and imagined access to knowledge of past events that Willows has is indicated by the unusual camera position and movement and the strong red colour of the component shots, since the camera position does not correspond to the physical position of any of the characters and the red colouring is not diegetically motivated.

When Grissom confronts Tina with Sidle's photographs, which reveal signs of bruising on Brenda's body, Tina sympathetically places her hand over the marks on the girl's chest. Tina reveals that she herself was abused much earlier as a child, and while she tells the story there is a reconstruction that must be understood as her retrospective visualisation of this. The sequence is accompanied by her voice-over narration, indicating that it represents her version of the events, and the shots are lit throughout with soft pink light. The camera shows Tina as a girl, with her mother closing Tina's bedroom door



Fig. 5.9

to reveal the father hiding behind it. The scene then cuts to a point-of-view shot of the father's chest and open shirt bending towards Tina's body, with the circular buffalo pendant swinging down towards her face (Fig. 5.9). This final shot in the sequence is still strongly coloured pink, and signifies the emotional weight of the memory for Tina by suddenly filling the screen with this big close-up of the pendant and the male chest looming over her. The pink light of the mental reconstruction connects with the reconstructions of the multiple murders such as Fig.

5.8 above, which are shot with a strong red light. It is as if the redness of those scenes has become greater as time passes, beginning with the soft pink light in the past and ending with the deep red, signifying both blood and the intensification of the effects of Tina's abuse. When considered together, it can be seen that the episode has established a systematic visual means to link the various reconstructed visualisations together.

Shades of red are not motivated by light sources in the episode's diegetic world, but are instead aspects of an expressive system within the narration.

CSI is distinctive in its use of long sequences showing the processes of autopsy and the scientific analysis of fragments from bodies or crime scenes, and this might suggest that the audience is expected to place confidence in the competence of the CSI team and their ability to reveal the truth of the fictional world. Referring to critical reaction to the series' beginning, and the principal characters of its Las Vegas, Miami and New York incarnations, CSI's executive producer, Carol Mendelsohn, explained that 'because CSI was very black and white – the evidence never lies – it was comforting in a grey world. There is comfort when Gil Grissom or Horatio Caine or Mac Taylor are on the case. There aren't many people you can trust in the world today' (in McLean 2005: 12). Fluid but slow camera movements track around the dimly-lit spaces of the crime labs, discovering the characters conducting procedures observed in long, wordless sequences of alternating close-ups and medium shots. These procedures consist of what might seem tedious work such as examining clothing fibres or skin cells through microscopes, or painstakingly arranging the fragments of an object on a light-table. Pace and interest is created in these long sequences by the addition of non-diegetic music, contrast of lighting and the camera's often elegant and extended movement. All of this seems to indicate a world which is knowable by the characters and the camera. That knowledge is gained by their special kinds of visual access to events in the past, through specialised forms of looking such as the 'CSI shot' of a wound, technological examination of evidence in the lab or reconstructions of a crime that the camera can convey to the viewer.

But the victims' versions of events are reconstructed in memory, even though the camera has a privileged ability to see them. Similarly, the investigators' hypotheses are represented visually by the camera but are sometimes wrong and are very frequently repeated in modified form. Events in the past are reconstructed fragmentarily and inadequately, inasmuch as more evidence revises or disproves them, and thus the camera's ability to convey reliable information is put into question. Attention is drawn to the CSI team's processes of investigation, which are dominated by forms of forensic analysis that the camera can show or reconstruct visually for the viewer, but these too are only significant when assembled into a narrative and such narratives are open to modification and contradiction. The investigative looks of the camera and the characters are presented as processes of seeing that seem easy but are in fact problematically linked with knowing. These ways of seeing are made surprisingly active as processes and experiences rather than punctual moments of perception, in that the narrative gives time to the investigators' work on the evidence, to the movement of the camera into the interior space of a bodily wound, or the re-experienced duration of a crime during a reconstruction sequence. The role of seeing as an action, process or performance becomes significant in itself because of the prominence given to the ways that the fictional world is offered to audience through the programme's style. Visual style therefore highlights

the conditional nature of seeing and the provisional nature of knowledge, because there are things that cannot be seen and things that can be only partially known. The technical processes of production of the images in *CSI*, and its systems for visually representing forensic investigation and detection more generally, are linked by their common effects of deferring and sometimes obscuring access to the truth of events. This occurs at the same time as these processes and systems of visualisation offer privileged kinds of look, deep within the human body or into a reconstructed past, for example, that appear to surpass the restrictions of sight and knowledge.

Conclusion

Two of the components that have been argued to characterise television as a medium are its possibility for intimacy and its potential for immediacy. Television is an intimate medium in the sense that it is broadcast into the private space of the home, and much of its output promises to reveal the detail of individual action through image and sound, with a special emphasis on the ability of the close-up to provide analytical observation of human behaviour. While this capacity is a resource for all television forms, it has been exploited particularly in police drama, where psychology, emotion and the expression of each of these has been facilitated by the patterning of dramatic forms to emphasise moments of character revelation. The immediacy of television derives historically from the fact that for the first twenty years or so after its invention it was very difficult to record television footage. This meant that in the USA and the UK television focused on the live broadcasting of both factual and fictional material, covering events such as sports fixtures or news events, and broadcasting drama that was shot live in the television studio and could not be repeated without assembling its cast of characters and performing the drama again. This expectation of immediacy, alongside intimacy, has a special relationship with realism in drama and the factual mode of television documentary, because of the claims of each to authenticity and witness. The police series is a programme type that has adopted hybrid blends of generic and modal resources from both fictional and factual programme forms, and necessarily addresses the meanings of seeing and knowing through these different forms.

Ultimately, this study argues for the significance of an evidence-based analysis of television aesthetics, which is particularly appropriate to the thematisation of pursuit, discovery, witness, explanation and justification that organises the visual and aural components of police series fiction. For police drama is always about what can be seen and evaluated, and how conclusions are drawn from evidence. This study has indicated that some police series reflexively meditate upon the activities of seeing and interpreting, to the extent that they become thoughtful and sometimes critical works about television itself.

Questions of authorship, 'quality', form, genre, historical development, institution and audience have conventionally been discussed in Television Studies as matters which require links to be established between programme texts, and this seems to militate against the kind of sustained attention to style adopted in this study. However, meta-arguments about these issues arise from and return to the style of programmes (see Bignell 2006), and the argument here is that the texture of individual texts needs to be at the heart of these apparently broader debates. The most significant challenge in planning and writing this study has been the relationship between detail and critical contexts, and the consequent problem of how to create coherent, free-standing chapters which at the same time relate to overall questions and themes. My answer to this was to discuss programme examples chronologically. This enabled concentration on episodes in their

own terms, giving due weight to the sequence analysis that is at the heart of this project, but in the context of recurrent concerns, both critical and generic.

In the US television industry, writing has been valued over direction, cinematography or the other professions connected to visual style. But in the analyses of programmes considered here, information about the intentions of their creators, and the close relationships between writer/producers, episode directors and cinematographers has shown that this is a distorting emphasis. In a parallel way, academic attention to popular television drama has been concerned to relate programmes to the 'literate' components shared with canonical literature or written drama such as 'narrative, sequential, abstract, univocal, "consistent"' aesthetic features (Fiske & Hartley 1978: 125) in ways that seek to appropriate the characteristics that connote quality in forms outside of television, but this study has argued for the crucial place of visual style in discussion of such aesthetic features. However, the intention has not been to displace one approach by another: the emphasis on collaboration in the production process brings with it a corresponding need to place visual style within the networks of decision-making that underpin the experience of viewing and to understand the systematic relationships within the series and the individual episode that these produce.

In this context close analysis of visual style in popular television drama opens up a means of linking the aesthetics of television drama texts to the lived dialectics of sense and taste making, in ways that have the potential to enrich the emphasis Television Studies has placed on the inherent vitality of audiences as active interpreters of meaning. As fictions set in a contemporary world, the series discussed in this study each address their audiences' lived experiences, though in different ways. Their visual styles have been shown to be fully integrated into these modes of address, and in fact to be inseparable from them. Such a process of valuing the popular by analysing relationships between style and meaning motivated the procedures of mise-en-scène criticism in academic film studies from which many of the analytical techniques used in this study derive (see Gibbs & Pye, 2005). Further work about television could benefit from adopting the methodology of detailed analysis which derives from that tradition, to avoid some of the confusions around the valuation of television as a medium and valuations of one kind of television over another that were discussed in the Introduction to this study.

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